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Table of Contents

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL _____ 3

GENERAL STUDIES I _____ 3

1. On Lokmanya Tilak's death centenary, it's time to re-examine his legacy _____ 3
2. Seal of justice _____ 5
3. During pandemic, we must keep older people engaged, not isolate them _____ 7
4. Kerala rains: Idukki landslide _____ 9

GENERAL STUDIES II _____ 12

1. The future of Indian secularism _____ 12
2. Resurrecting the right to know _____ 14
3. New National Education Policy's 5+3+3+4 format to replace 10+2 structure _____ 16
4. Education Policy does not adequately tackle issue of inequity arising out of medium of instruction _____ 19
5. Online Path to Healthcare _____ 21
6. India's population data and a tale of two projections _____ 23
7. Historic ratification: On universal ratification of a labour standard _____ 25
8. China-Russia ties as a major determinant _____ 28
9. RIC, a triangle that is still important _____ 30
10. Limited peace: On UAE-Israel peace agreement _____ 33

GENERAL STUDIES III _____ 35

1. Rebuild India's confidence, revive the economy _____ 35
2. The govt and RBI face a trilemma regarding PSBs _____ 38
3. Re-imagining and reinventing the Indian economy _____ 40
4. India does need a Fiscal Council _____ 42

5. Differential impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown _____ 45
6. PM-KISAN is not reaching all farmer households as intended _____ 47
7. More evidence of India's food insecurity _____ 49
8. More than a vaccine, it is about vaccination _____ 51
9. National well-being and the counts that matter _____ 54

RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS _____ 57

GENERAL STUDIES I _____ 57

1. Bridging Gender Gap _____ 57
2. National Water Policy _____ 59
3. Avalanche _____ 61

GENERAL STUDIES II _____ 63

1. Pendency of Case & Virtual Courts _____ 63
2. Role & Functions of National Recruitment Agency _____ 66
3. NEP 2020- Languages Culture & Values _____ 68
4. National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) _____ 70
5. Covid-19 & Mental Health _____ 71
6. Governance Index _____ 74
7. India's Act East Policy _____ 76

GENERAL STUDIES III _____ 79

1. India's Coal sector reforms _____ 79
2. Making India a manufacturing hub _____ 81
3. National Infrastructure Pipeline Dashboard _____ 82
4. SCIENCE MONITOR _____ 84
5. Drinking Water: Quality & Challenges _____ 90
6. Importance of Tiger Conservation _____ 92
7. World Elephant Day- Talking conflicts _____ 94
8. Tackling Human Trafficking _____ 96

ESSAYS _____ 100

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

GENERAL STUDIES I

1. On Lokmanya Tilak's death centenary, it's time to re-examine his legacy

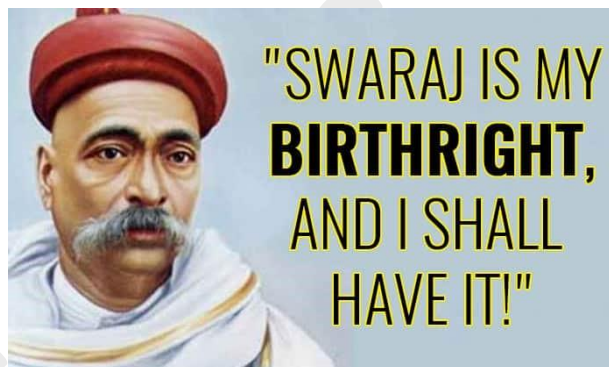
Introduction:

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the **foremost leader of India's freedom struggle** before the advent of the Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi era, breathed his last, after a brief illness, in Bombay in the early hours of August 1, 1920.
- Destiny snatched him away at a relatively young age. Had he lived longer, this lion among Indian patriots could have **changed the course of the nation's freedom struggle for the better**.
- Tilak was the tallest of the leaders of his generation who prepared the nation for the trials and triumphs of the Gandhian era.

First leader to recognise the importance of Identity:

- Identity** was once considered a **primordial subject by the social science fraternity**. But, then, there was a significant change.
- Many social scientists recognised the importance of identity as a factor that motivates human enterprise.
- Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was perhaps the first political leader in modern India to **appreciate the importance of identity issues**.
- He realised that these could be a tool to make inroads in the minds of an otherwise docile society.
- Once that was done, people could be motivated to join the struggle for independence, which explains **Tilak's clarion call for swaraj and swadeshi**.
- On August 1, 1920, a day before Gandhiji launched the **Non-Cooperation Movement**, Tilak passed away, thus marking the end of one and beginning of

another era that culminated in the realisation of his dream of free India.



Lokmanya Tilak: Father of the Indian renaissance:

- "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it!", this is the slogan that inculcated a **political conscience** among Indians **regarding self-rule**.
- The slogan was given by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Lokmanya means the man accepted by the people). Given his contribution, Tilak can be hailed as the **first mass leader** of the Indian Independence Movement.
- Mahatma Gandhi called him '**The Maker of Modern India**' or as British colonial authorities called him '**The father of Indian unrest**', testifies his legacy and contribution to Indian society and freedom struggle.
- As a philosopher-politician, his contribution is immense as he is said to be a pioneer of **ideas of swaraj and swadeshi and used culture, education and the media**.

Tilak's clarion call for swaraj and swadeshi:

- In both concepts, **swa or self is common**. Striving for **self-dependence**, in Tilak's strategy, was the stepping-stone for Independence.



2. Tilak wanted to inculcate both **collective thinking as well as action**. For the cultivation of an enlightened mind, he used the media in the form of two newspapers, **Kesari and Maratha**, and **national education** through Deccan Education Society, an institute he established.
3. His formula for preparing the **ground for political activism** through culture, education and media was so powerful that later on Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar and others adopted this path.
4. His **ideas of swaraj and swadeshi** were anchored in making every Indian conscious of the insults and injustice meted out by the British.
5. He prepared a **fertile ground for swaraj** through his **home-rule movement**. He was clear on the aim of the home rule movement.
6. However, his swadeshi was not just about boycotting British goods. Although he used the tools of boycott and bonfire of British goods to provide a window for popular participation, his **larger objective was promoting indigenous entrepreneurship**.
7. Tilak wanted to promote manufacturing in India. To that end, Tilak started collecting funds for a **corpus, known as Paisa Fund**.
8. Through this, Tilak supported Ishwar Das Varshney, an entrepreneur who was greatly inspired by Tilak's speech in the Surat Congress. Varshney later started Paisa Fund Glass Works at Talegaon near Pune.
4. He spoke of how we should "form one separate state each for Marathi, Telugu and Kanarese provinces." The principle that education should be given through the vernaculars is self-evident and clear.
5. Tilak adroitly used the two things — **constitutionalism and democracy** — that the British rulers used to boast about, to his maximum advantage.
6. To that end, he used both, his passion and professional acumen as editor and pleader dexterously.
7. His editorials were not only hard hitting, but well-argued and still carefully-worded in order to avoid legal implications.
8. Tilak was also known for not mincing his words. However, a scholar at heart, Tilak **used both activism in the field** as well as **opinion to hasten slowly and attain the goal of swaraj**, something his fellow Congressmen were wary of publicly speaking about at that time.

Conclusion:

- The tone and tenor of his demand were strategically conciliatory. He wrote: "India was like a son who had grown up and attained maturity."
- It was right now that the trustee or the father should give him what was his due. The people of India must get this effected. They have a right to do so."
- Today, when we talk about **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, the legacy of Tilak is carried forward.
- Reviving the **spirit of economic nationalism** for indigenously manufactured goods and **striving for social integration** through culture are the features of Tilak's strategy and they continue to be relevant even today as we observe his 100th death anniversary on August 1.

Blueprint of a post-Independence India in mind:

1. Tilak almost had a blueprint of a post-Independence India in mind.
2. For him, **swa-raj** was also liked to **swa-bhasha** and **swa-bhusha**, i.e. mother tongue and indigenous attire.
3. Perhaps, he was the first national leader who envisioned the **formation of linguistic states**.

2. Seal of justice

'GOAL OF GENDER JUSTICE ACHIEVED'

➤ SC irons out confusion arising from its own conflicting interpretations of the amended Section 6 (in force since Sept 9, 2005) of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956

➤ Spells out daughters' equal coparcenary rights in Hindu Undivided Family properties even if they were born before the 2005 amendment & regardless of whether their father

coparcener died before '05

➤ But the daughters won't get the right to question ancestral properties already disposed or alienated by then existing coparceners prior to December 20, 2004

➤ Rights of other relatives to remain unaffected as prevailed in the proviso to Sec 6 before amendment. It's only a case of enlargement of daughters' rights



Who is a coparcener? A Hindu who inherits property from his/her grandfather or great grandfather. Only a coparcener has the right to demand partition of property

“ The classic Shastric Hindu law excluded the daughter from being coparcener... (this) injustice has now been done away with by amending the provisions in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution. The goal of gender justice, as constitutionally envisaged, is achieved, though belatedly

— Supreme Court

Context:

- The Supreme Court of India in a recent judgment has again backed the fact that the **daughters cannot be deprived of their right of equality** conferred upon them by **Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956**.
- The judgment recognizes that in a coparcenary property, **the daughters have an equal right**.

Supreme Court judgment on daughters' right to property:

- The Supreme Court also stated that since the right in coparcenary is by birth, it is not necessary that father coparcener should be living as on 9.9.2005.
- The Supreme Court has placed Hindu women's right to inherit ancestral property beyond the pale of ambiguity a welcome ruling and a logical culmination of a long process to weed Indian laws of patriarchal prejudice.
- It was an exercise that was speeded up soon after Independence, with the framers of the Constitution inscribing the **promise of gender equality in the founding-document of the nation**.
- They walked the talk by pushing through the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, in the teeth of fierce opposition from conservative Hindu opinion.

What is coparcenary?

- A joint Hindu family means all people lineally descending from a common ancestor, including wives and unmarried daughters.
- But a **Hindu coparcenary is a much narrower group**. It consists of the 'propositus' (the person from whom a line of descent is traced) and three of his descendants.
- Coparcenary property is the one which is **inherited by a Hindu man** from his father, grandfather, or great grandfather.
- The property in coparcenary is held as joint owners, and only a coparcener has a right to demand a partition of this property.
- Before 2005, the coparceners included only sons, grandsons, and great grandsons who are holders of a joint property.
- But the 2005 amendment to Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act essentially gave **equal rights to daughters in ancestral property**.
- So the amendment allowed daughters to be recognised as coparceners by birth in the family, similar to sons.

174th Law Commission report suggestions to change property laws:

1. In 2000, the 174th Law Commission noted that “the framing of all property laws have been exclusively for the benefit of man” even though the right to property is “important for the freedom and development of a human being”.
2. It pushed for a change in law that barred women from being considered coparceners (or joint legal heirs) of a Hindu undivided joint family.
3. Only male descendants of an ancestor, their mothers, wives and unmarried daughters were given that right.
4. The commission’s report was followed through in Parliament by the **2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956** that said that a woman could be a coparcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”.
5. Nevertheless, the gap between precept and practice was manifest in several cases and in several court judgments, when the interpretations of whether the amendment could apply retrospectively or depended upon the father’s being alive in 2005 threw up conflicting answers.
6. The three-judge bench of the SC has put an end to this confusion by emphasising again that it is a right “by birth” of a Hindu woman to become a joint heir to ancestral property.
7. In doing so, the court has interpreted the law capaciously, keeping in mind the progressive intent behind the 2005 amendment.

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:

1. The **174th Law Commission Report** had recommended the **reform in Hindu succession law**.
2. Before the 2005 amendment, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu had made this change in the law and Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family System in 1975.

3. It gave Hindu women the right to be coparceners or joint legal heirs in the same way a male heir does.
4. The amended act made a daughter of a coparcener also a coparcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”.
5. The law also gave the daughter the **same rights and liabilities** “in the coparcenary property as she would have had if she had been a son”.
6. It **applies to ancestral property and to intestate succession** in personal property where succession happens as per law and not through a will.

Government’s stand:

- The Solicitor General of India has argued in favour of an expansive reading of the law to allow equal rights for women.
- He criticised the Mitakshara coparcenary 1956 law because it contributed to discrimination on the ground of gender and was also oppressive and negated the **fundamental right of equality (Articles 14 to 18)** guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

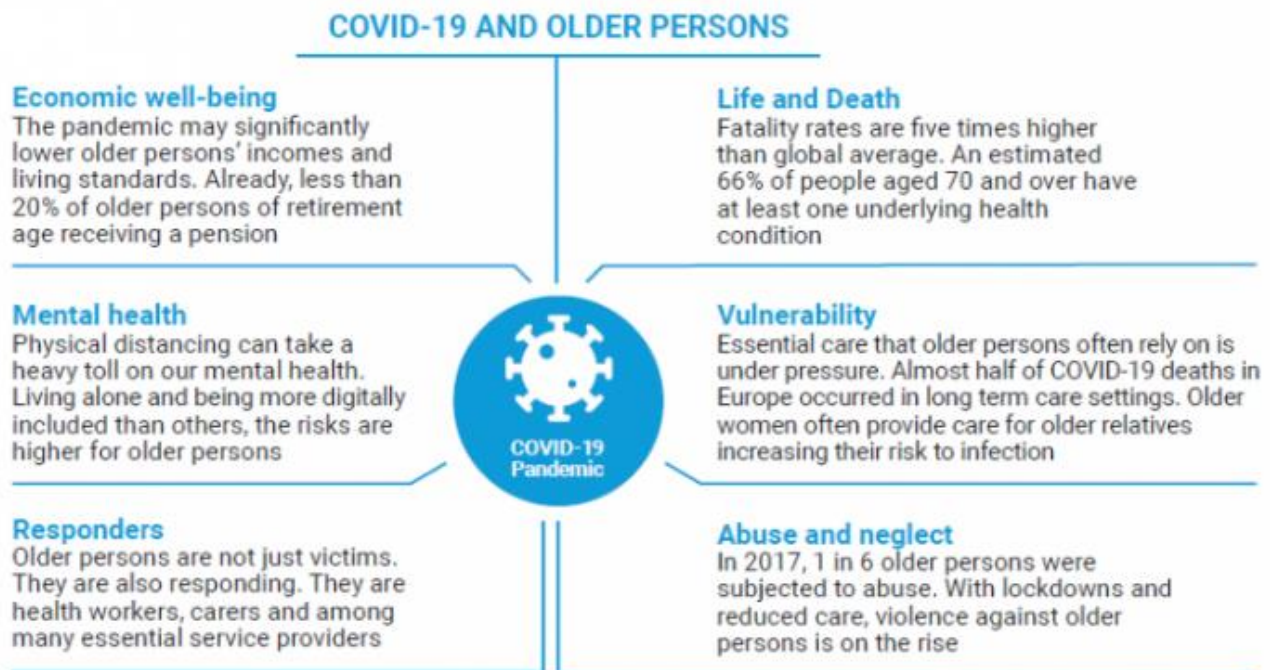
Conclusion:

- ❖ **Gender justice is far from being reality in India**, with several other inequalities of caste, religion and class reinforcing the secondary status of women.
- ❖ Over the years, the expansion of educational and other opportunities has bent social attitudes **towards gender justice**, making what seemed abhorrently subversive once (the right to divorce, the end of polygamy) a matter of reasonable progress now.
- ❖ But the judgment is in sync with a larger churn in Indian life, that has seen women extract similar concessions from families and religions, that involves citizens and communities using constitutional promises to push institutions towards change.

This ruling is a seal on a substantive change in the Hindu undivided family.



3. During pandemic, we must keep older people engaged, not isolate them



Introduction:

- The **most vulnerable persons** during the COVID pandemic are the **elderly**. If infected, their odds of survival are the lowest.
- When shut away to save them from infection, they are likely to suffer from neglect from lack of care for other ailments, and loneliness. The pandemic has highlighted humanity's dilemma of what to do with older people.
- Globally, the population aged 65 and over is growing faster than other age groups. Life spans are increasing with better healthcare, nutrition and sanitation.
- In 2018, for the first time in history, people aged 65 or above outnumbered children. Children are our future, no doubt.
- However, the changing shape of populations threatens to bankrupt economies.

WHO delivers advice and support for older people during COVID-19:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the global population in drastic ways.

2. In many countries, older people are facing the most threats and challenges at this time.
3. Although all age groups are at risk of contracting COVID-19, older people face significant risk of developing severe illness if they contract the disease due to physiological changes that come with ageing and potential underlying health conditions.
4. Asking the **elderly to self-isolate** is one of the most effective COVID-19 prevention strategies.
5. But **strong intergenerational ties and issues** related to living arrangements can make physical distancing difficult for older persons.
6. **About 88 per cent of elderly people in India** live with their children. So, their risk of contracting the infection from family members remains high.
7. Living with the extended family may allow the elderly to access healthcare services, but a growing body of scholarship shows that it leaves them vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment.
8. On the other hand, for the 17 million who don't live with their extended family, or have made arrangements to live separately

due to COVID-19, life is lonely. They have difficulty in accessing food, water and basic services.

Older people want to add more life to their years, not more years to their life:

1. As well as exposing fragile business models, the pandemic has highlighted the tension between keeping old people safe and keeping them well.
2. People should be the boss of their own lives. It is better to live in a house than a warehouse.
3. All things must be considered before prescribing strong medicines. Indeed, this is why we are so careful about testing new medicines for COVID-19 before releasing them for public use.
4. The pandemic has revealed many factors that contribute to human well-being. Lockdowns a strong medicine to prevent COVID-19 deaths have harmed human well-being in many ways, by other medical problems that could not be attended to and even by starvation in poorer countries due to disruptions of the economy.
5. In India, as elsewhere, attention is focused every day on counting the deaths caused by COVID-19.
6. The other tragedies, though not counted, are visible in heart-rending images of migrants struggling to find succour, and people denied healthcare for other diseases.

Healthcare schemes like the Ayushman Bharat Yojana should have special provisions for the elderly. **Tele-health and mobile home-based health care check-ups** should be conducted for them.

Direct subsidies to pensioners, especially in healthcare matters, can also help them tide over these difficult times. Such measures are essential to the right of a dignified life.

Strong local systems have done better:

- What we have learned from the pandemic is that **local systems solutions**, developed and implemented by communities, are necessary **to solve complex problems**.

- Communities understand their needs and their capabilities better than experts, who are distant from them.
- Collaboration on the ground has enabled many communities to prevent the spread of the pandemic, as well as taken care of other needs of their members.
- In India, Kerala, with its **systems of local, collaborative action**, seems to have done much better than other states. Internationally, countries with strong local systems have done better.

Case study: OPA (Older Persons' Associations) movement:

1. **Vietnam** seems to have survived the pandemic better than most countries. One reason is the strength of the **OPA (Older Persons' Associations) movement** which the government has supported for many years.
2. OPAs operate in all districts of the country. They are adding younger members and transforming themselves into Inter-Generational Self-Help Groups.
3. They take responsibility for the most vulnerable people in their communities — most of whom are older people.
4. They also work with local officials **to improve local services and infrastructure** for the benefit of the whole community.
5. They are “nodes” in networks of actors who know what is required and who can, working together, improve services for everyone.
6. The **older members** of these groups are proving to be **valuable assets for the community**.
7. Moreover, because they are active and they feel valued, they add more good life to their remaining years.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Older people have an **invaluable role** to play in **our collective future**. We must keep older people **engaged**, not shut them out to protect their bodies from the virus.



- ❖ Unfortunately, the generic medicine of “**physical distancing**” to fight the pandemic has been branded as “social distancing”.

- ❖ We need “**social cohesion**”, not “social distancing”, in communities, and in humanity as a whole, to fight this pandemic and also **improve human well-being**.

4. Kerala rains: Idukki landslide

Context:

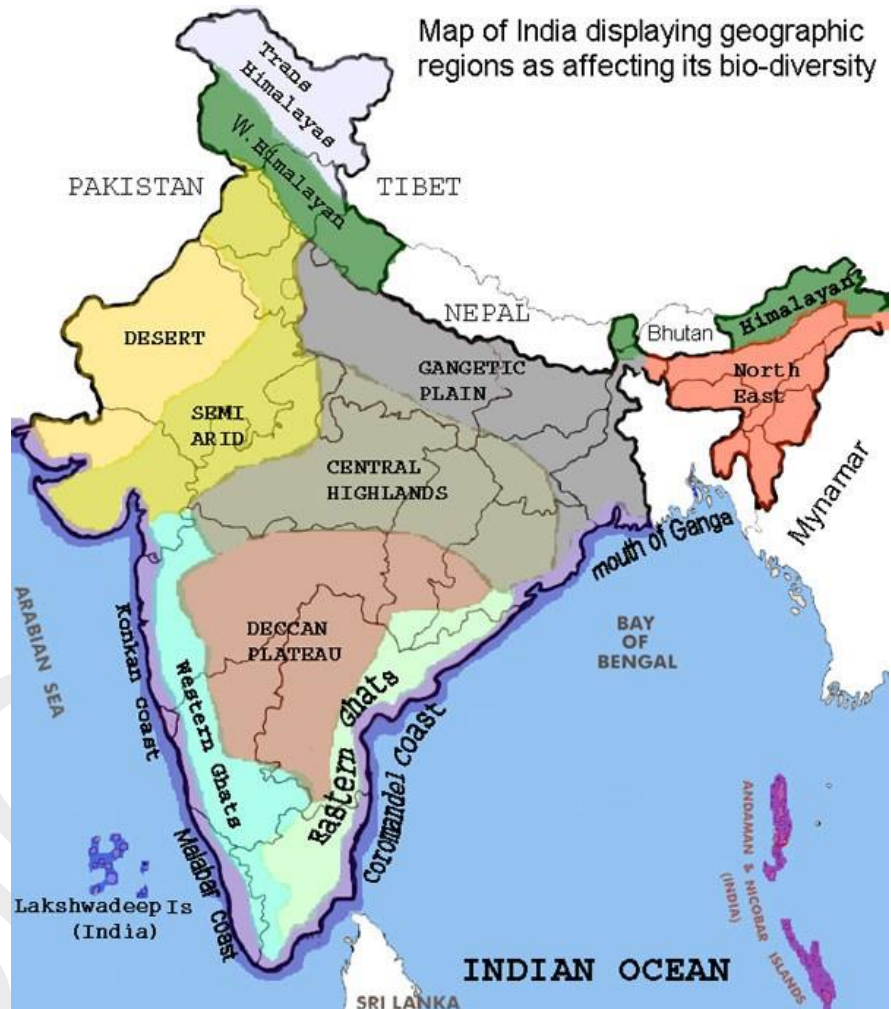
- Landslides have caused **massive damage of life and property** during extremely heavy rain across India, most recently in Kerala.
- The Kedarnath landslide in Uttarakhand in June 2013, caused by flash floods that resulted in over 5,000 deaths, was identified as the most tragic such disaster.
- The landslip in Idukki, that has so far claimed 43 lives and rendered several homeless, follows from a continuing spell of heavy rains in Kerala.
- Most districts have received **three or four times more rain than what is normal**. Last year too,

neighbouring **Wayanad** saw multiple hamlets wiped out and the year before, the devastating floods in the State forced a debate on the need for new models of development.

Regarding about Landslides:

- A **landslide** is defined as the movement of a mass of rock, debris, or earth down a slope.
- Landslides are a type of “mass wasting (a geomorphic process),” which denotes any down-slope movement of soil and rock under the direct influence of gravity.

Map of India displaying geographic regions as affecting its bio-diversity



- Several things can **trigger landslides**, including the **slow weathering** of rocks as well as soil erosion, earthquakes and volcanic activity.
- As per Geological Survey of India, the **window of economic loss** due to landslides may **reach between 1-2% of the gross national product** in many developing countries.

Landslides in Western Ghats region:

- Landslips, or landslides, in the Western Ghats have a history. Following the 2018 floods, data from the Geological Survey of India showed that Kerala had experienced

67 major landslide events and several minor ones from 1961-2013.

- As part of a National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme, the agency mapped several States in the **Western Ghats, North-eastern States, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand** to assess how vulnerable their districts were.
- Nearly 13,000 square kilometres were mapped until 2018 and 6,000 were to be covered in 2019-20 in Kerala, according to the programme website.
- Nearly 13 of the State's 14 districts were prone to landslides and what made Kerala particularly vulnerable was the high population density over 800 per square kilometre compared to other States that also faced high landslide risk.

Landslides: Damage:

1. Every year, landslides in the region kill dozens of people and cause widespread damage to several villages such that they have now become almost unfit for habitation.
2. They create blockades in the road network and river system, which in turn, cause floods.
3. The terraced farm fields have been destroyed that cannot be easily renovated or made productive again.
4. The road network remains closed for long periods causing indescribable hardship to the villagers who get their basic supplies and provisions from the neighbouring areas.
5. Water sources are disrupted and choked by debris from landslides.
6. The river sediment load is increased considerably, causing irregular courses and frequent breaching of the banks- resulting into unexpected floods.
7. The water channels are affected from the up hillside due to which the villagers are devoid of water for irrigation purposes. This adversely affects agriculture production in the region.

India among nations most affected by landslides due to human activities: study:

1. Landslides triggered by human activities are on the rise around the world and India is among the most-affected countries, accounting for at least 28% of such events over last 12 years, according to a study published.
2. Researchers compiled data on over 4,800 fatal landslides which occurred from 2004 to 2016, leaving out those caused by earthquakes.
3. More than 56,000 people were killed by landslides around the world during the period, a majority of which **involved a single slope**, according to the study based on the Global Fatal Landslide Database (GFLD).
4. At least 700 of these fatal landslides were caused by construction works, illegal mining and unregulated hill-cutting.
5. While the trend is global, **Asia** was found to be the **most-affected continent** where **75% of landslides occurred**, with a substantial number reported along the Himalayan Arc.
6. All countries in the top 10 for fatal landslides triggered by human activity are located in Asia. India accounts for 20% of these incidents.
7. The research said **human-triggered fatal landslides** are **increasing** at the highest rate in India, where 28% construction-triggered landslide events occurred during the period, followed by China (9%), Pakistan (6%), the Philippines (5%), Nepal (5%) and Malaysia (5%).
8. We were aware that humans are placing increasing pressure on their local environment, but it was surprising to find clear trends within the database that fatal landslides triggered by construction, illegal hill-cutting and illegal mining were increasing globally during the period.

National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) demarcate zoning laws:

- The objective of the NLSM maps is **to help State and district authorities** incorporate the **risk of landslides into zoning laws**.

- However, just as in the case of earthquake zonation maps, or for that matter, any exercise to scientifically ascertain the risk from natural hazards to a region, these laws are barely implemented in the right spirit.
- And this is not unique to Kerala. The details might vary but it is now beyond contestation that India is living in a new climate normal.
- **Frequent high intensity bursts of rain** will co-exist along with long dry spells. It has emerged from studies of **Kerala's topography** that quarrying and the unscientific cutting of slopes into hills aggravates the risk of soil erosion.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Operationalising the **State's disaster management apparatus** and **allocating funds for preparedness** are key policy responses, but Kerala also must double down on **enforcing regulations** and observing **zoning laws** as well as ensuring that slopes carved into hilly terrain have adequate provisions for draining water.
- ❖ A lack of compliance with such principles is often a key reason why natural hazards end up causing a significant number of avoidable casualties.

- ❖ There is a cost to pursuing development goals without paying attention to environmental constraints.

Way Forward: Preparedness and Mitigation:

- ✓ Important preparatory strategies could involve **monitoring and landslide prediction**.
- ✓ The National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme of the Geological Survey of India could help assess **the vulnerability of the districts** and this could allow the concerned states to plan accordingly.
- ✓ **Installing early warning systems** based on the monitoring of ground conditions like slope displacement, strain in soil and rocks, groundwater levels can help warn the residents and authorities of the risks.
- ✓ **Landslide Education, Awareness and Capacity Building** among the residents and the local administration must be an important preparation strategy.
- ✓ The **district and state disaster management apparatus** should be ready for intervention at a short notice.

GENERAL STUDIES II

1. The future of Indian secularism

Need of Secular Education In India

- India is a multi religious and culturally varied society.
- Fanaticism, communalism and regionalism are on the increase.
- Equality, liberty, fraternity, national outlook and international understanding need to be propagated
- We need secular education due to the erosion of values, narrow mindedness, selfishness etc.
- To train the youth to be good citizens.
- To inculcate in the youth social, moral and cultural values.
- To strengthen secularism and human relationship in India.
- To fulfill the requirements of democratic India.

Context:

- Recent event of the Prime Minister attending the inauguration of Ayodhya temple under official capacity.
- It is argued that this is against the **principle of secularism** where the state cannot promote any one religion and must treat all religions equally.

Secularism during freedom struggle:

1. Indian freedom movement was characterized by **secular tradition and ethos** right from the start.
2. In the initial part of the Indian freedom movement, the liberals like Sir Feroz Shah Mehta, Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale by and large pursued a secular approach to politics.
3. The constitution drafted by Pandit Moti Lal Nehru as the chairman of the historic **Nehru Committee in 1928**, had **many provision on secularism**.
4. 'There shall be no state religion for the commonwealth of India or for any province in the commonwealth, nor shall the state, either directly or indirectly, endow any religion any preference or impose any disability on account of religious beliefs or religious status'.
5. Secularism was never meant to be the indifference to religion by our

leaders and freedom fighters, who realised that India is a highly religious country.

6. That is why even the most orthodox Hindus and Muslims accepted it as a viable ideology for India.
7. But after independence Indian secularism followed a tortuous course and religious fundamentalism has grown dangerously in the last few decades.

Constitutional Articles related to Secularism:

1. **Article 14** grants equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to all, **Article 15** enlarges the concept of secularism to the widest possible extent by prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
2. **Article 16 (1)** guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and reiterates that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth and residence.
3. **Article 25** provides 'Freedom of Conscience', that is, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion.
4. As per **Article 26**, every religious group or individual has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
5. As per **Article 27**, the state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution.
6. **Article 28** allows educational institutions maintained by different religious groups to impart religious instruction.
7. **Article 29 and Article 30** provides cultural and educational rights to the minorities.
8. **Article 51Ae**. Fundamental Duties obliges all the citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to value



and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.

Term 'Secular': forty-second constitution Amendment Act of 1976

- The term '**Secular**' was added to the preamble by the forty-second constitution Amendment Act of 1976, (India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic).
- It emphasises the fact that constitutionally, India is a secular country which has no State religion.
- And that the state shall recognise and accept all religions, not favour or patronize any particular religion.

Indian Secularism: Respect and critique towards all religions:

Constitutional secularism is marked by **at least two features**.

1. First, **critical respect for all religions**.
2. Unlike some secularisms, ours is not blindly anti-religious but **respects religion**. Unlike the secularisms of pre-dominantly single religious societies, **it respects not one but all religions**.
3. However, given the virtual impossibility of distinguishing the religious from the social, as B.R. Ambedkar famously observed, every aspect of religious doctrine or practice cannot be respected. Respect for religion must be accompanied by critique.
4. It follows that our state must respectfully leave religion alone but **also intervene** whenever religious groups **promote communal disharmony and discrimination on grounds of religion** (an inter-religious matter) or are unable to protect their own members from the oppressions they perpetuate (an intra-religious issue).
5. Second feature, the **Indian state abandons strict separation** but keeps a **principled distance from all religions**.
6. For instance, it **cannot tolerate untouchability** or leave all personal laws as they are. Equally, it may non-preferentially

subsidise schools run by religious communities.

7. Thus, it has to constantly decide when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending entirely on which of these enhances our constitutional commitment to freedom, equality and fraternity.
8. This constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an **impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry**.

Critical views to the present party-political secularism:

- Today, Indian constitutional secularism is swallowed up by this **party-political secularism**, with not a little help from the Opposition, media and judiciary.
- This **party-political 'secular' state**, cozying up alternately to the fanatical fringe of the minority and the majority, was readymade for takeover by a majoritarian party.
- This was accomplished by removing the word 'all' and replacing it by 'majority': respect only the majority religion; never criticise it, but recklessly demonise others; and ridding the state of the corrupt practice of opportunistic distance not by restoring principled distance but magically abolishing distance altogether.
- This is untrammelled majoritarianism masquerading as secularism, one that opposes 'pseudo-secularism' without examining its own equally unethical practices.
- Grounded in millennia-old pluralist traditions, it cannot easily be brushed aside.
- Brakes have been suddenly applied to this largely state-driven political project of dealing with **inter-religious issues** such as communal harmony. It has come to a screeching halt, broken down.

Way Forward:

- ✓ Two crucial moves to kick-start the discourse and practice of secularism.



- ✓ First, a shift of focus from a politically-led project to a **socially-driven movement for justice**.
- ✓ Second, a shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues.
- ✓ More focus on intra religious issues will ensure that inter religious issues won't worsen further. It will give breathing space for evolving new forms of socio-religious tolerance which promote secularism, inclusion and democracy.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **Gandhiji's secularism** was based on a commitment to the brotherhood of religious communities based on their respect for and pursuit of truth, whereas, J. L. Nehru's secularism was based on a commitment to scientific humanism tinged with a progressive view of historical change.
- ❖ Needed today are **new forms of socio-religious reciprocity**, crucial for the business of everyday life and novel ways of reducing the political alienation of citizens, a **democratic deficit** whose ramifications go beyond the ambit of secularism.

2. Resurrecting the right to know

Context:

- A **High Level Committee (HLC)** chaired by a retired judge of the Gauhati High Court and including, among others, the Advocates General of two Northeast States was constituted by the Home Ministry through a gazette notification of July 15, 2019.
- Its mandate was, among others, to recommend **measures to implement**

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord and define "Assamese People".

- The HLC finalised its report by mid-February 2020 and submitted it to the Assam Chief Minister soon after. He handed over the report to the Union Home Minister on March 20.

Clause 6 : Constitutional, Legislative & Administrative safeguards

Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

A number of actions have been taken under this clause so far which includes - The Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society was established under clause 6 of the historic Assam Accord and committed to work for preservation, promotion and upliftment of culture of the people of Assam.



MHA's Clause 6 panel sets 1951 as year to determine Assamese:

- A **high-level committee** on implementation of **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs has said that 'Assamese people' should be determined by taking 1951 as a cut-off year.
- The report said that the **definition of 'Assamese People'** for the purpose of implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord should include Indigenous Tribals as well as other Indigenous Communities of Assam, all other citizens of India residing in the territory of Assam on or before 01.01.1951 and Indigenous Assamese and their descendants.

What is Assam Accord?

1. **The Assam Accord (1985)** was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.
2. It was a **tripartite accord** signed between the Government of India, State Government of Assam and the leaders of the Assam Movement in 1985.
3. The accord brought an **end to the Assam Agitation** and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation **to form a political party** and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
4. As per the Accord, those **Bangladeshis** who came **between 1966 and 1971** will be barred from voting for ten years.
5. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.
6. Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Clause 6 of the Accord:

- It says that **constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards**, as may be

appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

- The committee chaired by **Biplab Kumar Sarma** was constituted to define 'Assamese People' and institute safeguards for them.

Recommendation of the committee chaired by Biplab Kumar Sarma:

- The report **proposes January 1951** as the **cut-off date** for any Indian citizen residing in Assam to be defined as an Assamese for the purpose of implementing Clause 6.
- The report seeks reservation for Assamese in Parliament, state assembly, local bodies. It recommended creating an Upper House (Legislative Council of Assam) whose seats will be **reserved for the 'Assamese people'**. The report also seeks quotas in government jobs.

Development in the right to information campaign:

- A significant development in the right to information campaign has largely gone unnoticed.
- The resurrection of the right to know is momentous considering that we are increasingly witnessing an unfortunate denial of information while forgetting the right to know.
- Sitting idle over a report is not an uncommon phenomenon. **The Vohra Committee report** on the alleged nexus between politicians and criminals was kept under wraps for almost two years. It was tabled in Parliament following a public uproar on the murder of Naina Sahni by a prominent politician.
- The key legal and constitutional issue that needs to be considered is whether the definition of an Assamese or a Bengali or a Punjabi or a Tamil define her/his Indian-ness or an Indian citizenship.
- The definition of Assamese is connected to the NRC process as the Assam Accord

cannot be reviewed in isolation of one clause or the other.

The Right to know and concept of freedom of speech:

1. **The right to know** was recognised nearly 50 years ago and is the foundational basis or the direct emanation for the **right to information**.
2. In **State of U.P. v. Raj Narain (1975)**, the Supreme Court carved out a class of documents that **demand protection** even though their contents may not be damaging to the national interest.
3. For example, Cabinet papers, foreign office despatches, papers regarding the security of the state and high-level interdepartmental minutes.
4. A **pragmatic view** was held that “the people of this country have a **right to know every public act**, everything that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries.
5. They are entitled to know the **particulars of every public transaction** in all its bearing.
6. **The right to know**, which is derived from the **concept of freedom of speech**, though not absolute, is a factor which should make one wary, when secrecy is claimed for transactions which can, at any rate, have no repercussion on public security.”
7. This view was **endorsed in S.P. Gupta v. President of India (1981)** and a few other decisions.

8. In **S.P. Gupta**, Justice Venkataramiah observed that “the tendency in all democratic countries in recent times is to liberalise the restrictions placed on the right of the citizens to know what is happening in the various public offices.
9. The emphasis now is more on the right of a citizen to know than on his ‘need to know’ the contents of official documents.”

Conclusion: Being more transparent is the Way Forward:

Keeping in mind the view expressed by the Supreme Court over nearly 50 years, it is clear that the **Official Secrets Act is not attracted to the disclosure of the HLC report**.

There is no doubt that a **bold and progressive decision** has been taken by AASU to release the report in **public interest**.

Hopefully, this will encourage governments to effectuate the citizen’s right to know and be **more transparent in public interest**, as long as the security of the country is not jeopardised.

As observed by the Supreme Court in **S.P. Gupta**: “If **secrecy** were to be observed in the **functioning of government** and the processes of government were to be kept **hidden from public scrutiny**, it would tend to promote and encourage oppression, corruption and misuse or abuse of authority, for it would all be shrouded in the veil of secrecy without any public accountability.”

3. New National Education Policy’s 5+3+3+4 format to replace 10+2 structure

Context:

- The government unveiled the **new National Education Policy** bringing a number of reforms almost after 34 years.
- One of the salient features of the new education policy is replacing the 10+2 structure of school curriculum with a **5+3+3+4 curriculum structure** corresponding to **age groups 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively**.
- The **NEP committee** under **Dr Kasturirangan’s leadership** recognises this

fundamental differentiator, and has laid out a far-reaching vision to create learning environments that are **multidisciplinary**, that cater to a **well-rounded education for all individuals**, and has the **immense potential to transform India’s human capital development**.

New Education Policy: Highlights

1. All higher education institutions, except legal and medical colleges, to be governed by a single regulator.
2. Common norms to be in place for private and public higher education institutions.

3. MPhil courses to be discontinued.
4. Board exams to be based on knowledge application.
5. Home language, mother tongue or regional language to be medium of instruction up to class 5.
6. Common entrance exams to be held for admission to universities and higher education institutions.
7. School curriculum to be reduced to core concepts; integration of vocational education from class 6.

New National Education Policy with focus on multi-disciplinary learning:

1. The focus will now be on the **graded academic, administrative and financial autonomy of institutions**.
2. The government said it plans to achieve a **gross enrolment ratio of 50% by 2035** and promote **multi-disciplinary and inclusive education**.

School learning reforms:

1. The Centre said that the new education policy will focus on **reducing the course burden on school students** to allow **activity-based learning**.
2. It proposes that students be taught life skills along with their mandatory subjects. It will also focus on **increasing the use of technology for learning**.
3. It will break down school learning to the 5+3+3+4 format. The first five years in school will be the foundation stage.
4. The next three years will make up the preparatory stage (classes 3 to 5).
5. Classes 6 to 8 will be the middle stage and 9 to 12 will be the secondary stage. Students will be allowed to take up courses across disciplines.

Equitable and Inclusive Education:

1. NEP 2020 aims to ensure that **no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel** because of the circumstances of birth or background.

2. Special emphasis will be given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) which include gender, socio-cultural, and geographical identities and disabilities.
3. This includes setting up of **Gender Inclusion Fund** and also **Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups**.
4. Children with disabilities will be enabled to **fully participate in the regular schooling process** from the foundational stage to higher education, with support of educators with cross disability training, resource centres, accommodations, assistive devices, appropriate technology-based tools and other support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs.
5. Every state/district will be encouraged to **establish "Bal Bhavans"** as a special daytime boarding school, to participate in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Free school infrastructure can be used as Samajik Chetna Kendras.

Robust Teacher Recruitment and Career Path:

1. Teachers will be recruited through **robust, transparent processes**. Promotions will be **merit-based**, with a mechanism for **multi-source periodic performance appraisals** and available progression paths to become educational administrators or teacher educators.
2. A common **National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST)** will be developed by the **National Council for Teacher Education by 2022**, in consultation with NCERT, SCERTs, teachers and expert organizations from across levels and regions.

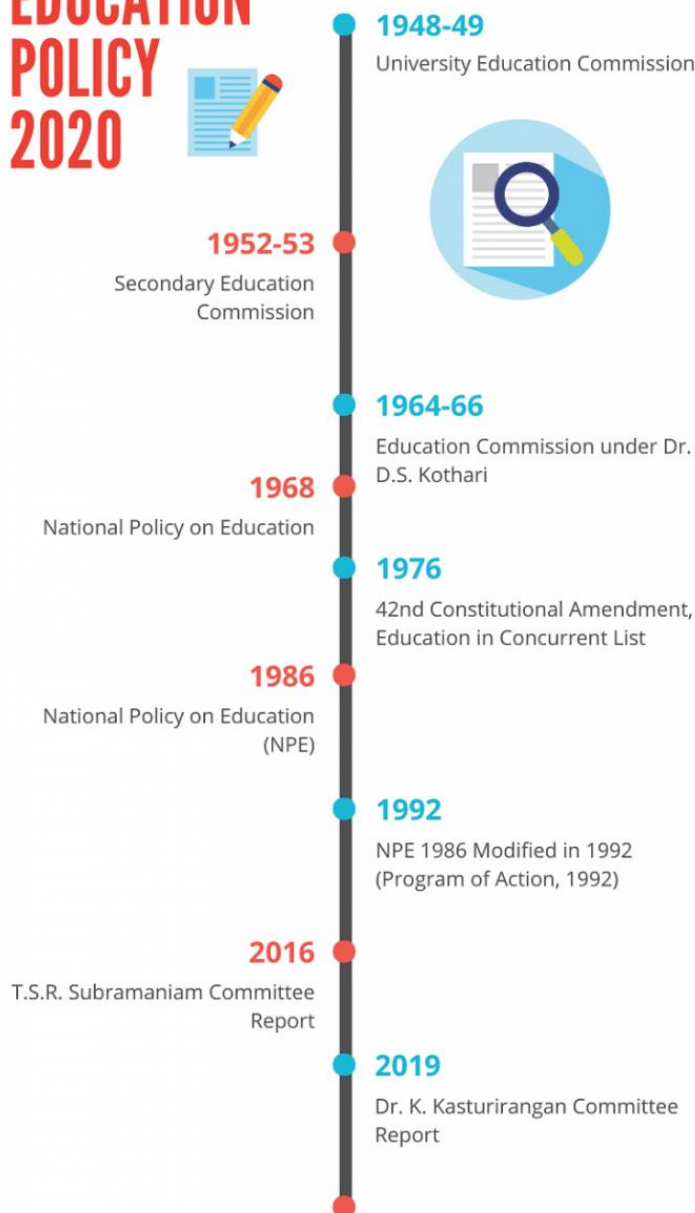
Promotion of Indian languages:

1. To ensure the **preservation, growth, and vibrancy of all Indian languages**, NEP recommends setting an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI), National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit, strengthening of Sanskrit and all language departments in HEIs, and use mother tongue/local



A BRIEF HISTORY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY 2020

The **National Education Policy 2020** aims to make major transformational reforms in the education sector in India. Here's a quick look at its evolution so far.



NEP 2020: CONSULTATION PROCESS

- Online on www.MyGov.in (Jan-Oct 2015)
- Nearly 2.5 lakhs Gram Panchayats, 6600 Blocks, 6000 ULBs, 676 Districts (May-Oct 2015)
- Draft NEP, 2019 Summary in 22 languages/Audio Book
- Education Dialogue with MPs (AP, Kerala, Telangana, TN, Puducherry, Karnataka & Odisha)
- Special Meeting of CABE (Sep 2019)
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on HRD (Nov 2019)



language as a medium of instruction in more HEI programmes.

2. **Internationalization** of education will be facilitated through both institutional collaborations, and student and faculty mobility and allowing entry of top world ranked Universities to open campuses in our country.

Rationalised Institutional Architecture:

- Higher education institutions will be transformed into large, well resourced, **vibrant multidisciplinary institutions** providing high quality teaching, research, and community engagement.
- The definition of university will **allow a spectrum of institutions** that range from Research-intensive Universities to Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous degree-granting Colleges.
- Affiliation of colleges is to be phased out in 15 years and a **stage-wise mechanism** is to be established for granting graded autonomy to colleges.
- Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university.

Motivated, Energized, and Capable Faculty:

- NEP makes recommendations for motivating, energizing, and building capacity of faculty through clearly defined, independent, transparent recruitment, freedom to design curricula/pedagogy, incentivising excellence, movement into institutional leadership. Faculty not delivering on basic norms will be held accountable.

Online Education and Digital Education:

- A **comprehensive set of recommendations** for promoting online education consequent to the recent rise in epidemics and pandemics in order to ensure preparedness with **alternative modes of quality education** whenever and

wherever traditional and in-person modes of education are not possible, has been covered.

- A dedicated unit for the purpose of orchestrating the **building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building** will be created in the MHRD to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education.

However, concerns that need to be addressed:

1. Talking about the spend of the government in education sector, "The goals of 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education and 100% in secondary school are laudable.
2. But when you realise it's currently 25.8% in Higher Education & 68% in Class 9, you wonder if such targets are any more realistic than the Govt's solar-energy commitments at Paris.
3. The NEP should have offered **more tangible & realisable targets for research**. Total investment on research & innovation in

India declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.6% in 2018.

4. There are currently only 15 researchers in India per 100,000 of population, compared with 111 in China.

Conclusion:

- These present wide-ranging reforms in the policy are aimed at **making the Indian education system more contemporary and skill-oriented**.
- The NEP also renamed the HRD (human resource development) ministry as the education ministry.
- Proper implementation of the reforms and ideas envisioned in the NEP 2020 will fundamentally transform India.
- With the emphasis on **knowledge-economy driven growth** in the 21st century, this is precisely what India needs to dominate in the future decades of growth and **drive the education requirements of our young population**.

4. Education Policy does not adequately tackle issue of inequity arising out of medium of instruction

Context:

- An astounding 34 years since its education policy was last revised, India is again at the cusp of a glorious and historic reform with the announcement of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- Timely and progressive, NEP marks a monumental development in the country's education system.

Issue of medium of instruction:

1. The **medium of instruction** has been a way of perpetuating class and caste structures in India. Accepting this reality will help us **make sense of the language policy** since Independence as well as the **New Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020)**.

2. NEP 2020 has many positives, including not making Hindi compulsory in South Indian states.
3. The pedagogically relevant and politically sensitive issue of the medium of instruction, the policy seems to follow the well-trodden path.
4. It says that the **mother-tongue or the regional language** would be the "preferred" mode of instruction till Class 5, possibly Class 8.
5. Over the years, while school enrolment has increased, the quality of education in bhasha schools invariably government schools has deteriorated. At the same time, most students from the well-off sections have opted out of them.
6. This shift from bhasha schools to English-medium schools first happened in the metros, then in middle-level cities and has reached the villages now. The bhasha



schools have begun drawing children from the Bahun Samaj.

BREAKFAST AT SCHOOL

Key features of the draft National Education Policy

School education

- Three years of preschool instead of two, followed by 12 years of schooling
- Free and compulsory schooling under Right to Education from preschool till Grade (Class) XII, instead of the current Class I to VIII
- A nutritious breakfast — perhaps of milk and a banana — for preschool and primary school pupils in addition to the midday meal
- Children to be exposed to

multiple languages right from the “foundational stage”, made up of preschool and Grades (Classes) I and II

Higher Education

- Four-year honours programmes for undergraduate general-stream courses
- Multiple exit options: Students can leave with a diploma after two years or with a graduate degree (without honours) after three years

Basha schools (regional languages) children suffer from two handicaps:

1. First, the extremely poor quality of education in most bhasha schools — with exceptions in states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
2. Second, such children rarely have a tradition of education in their families and find it very difficult to compete with their peers who have a much better financial background, better education and proficiency in English.
3. But the benefit of expanding education is that such children, who would not ask for a better deal earlier, are now making their demands clear.
4. One remembers the agitation in 2014 when the Hindi-speaking students were arguing that the higher education system is loaded against the bhasha medium students, especially at the UPSC level.
5. There is a conflict between what the educationists say — one understands the subject best in the mother-tongue, we as a nation should not lose such a multitude of languages, studying in the English-medium leads to gaps in the **understanding of one's own society** and what the parents think is necessary for the economic survival of their children.
6. So, parents send their kids to English-medium schools as soon as they can afford it. The bhasha medium students do not get the coveted jobs and the disparity between the two widens.
7. In fact, the document, iterated over the last few years, is an ode to the ideals of public policy, factoring in voices of every stakeholder from experts to teachers and the common man.
8. It is informed by insights from 2.5 lakh gram panchayats across the country.

Concerns that need to be addressed:

- NEP 2020 does **not tackle the issue of inequity** that arises out of the medium of instruction.
- The document pays lip-service to the **promotion of bhashas**, but the policy will end up reinforcing the status quo. The English-medium schools will continue as they are, rather more of them will sprout.
- But the agitation of 2014 could be a harbinger of the possible political unacceptability of this “manner of doing things”.
- One could let all students study English from an earlier age. Admittedly, this goes against the basic principles of education, and the non-elite will face more problems in studying English.
- But an exposure to basic English from a very young age in bhasha schools through rhymes, simple sentences could make learning the language later much easier.
- Making special funds available for English-teaching at panchayat or zila parishad level schools could also help. These could be some steps in making school education somewhat **more egalitarian**.
- The challenge is to implement this policy in **letter and spirit**. There is a **need to create comprehensive, efficient and realistic guidelines and framework**.

Moral and Basic education is the need of the hour:

- In sum, the NEP will strengthen the **fundamentals of moral and basic education** and provide opportunities for **equitable and qualitative development** that is sensitive to local cultural contexts and global possibilities.
- This, in turn, will lead to the development of an innovative, analytical, just and aware Indian consciousness expediting the development of a **prosperous and self-reliant nation (Aatmanirbhar Bharat)**.
- As with every policy, the real test of NEP will be **translating it to action**.
- Backed by expeditious and effective implementation in sync with its spirit, NEP could shape the lives of our future generations.
- Through a **robust education system**, leveraging the full potential of its demographic dividend, India has taken a giant leap towards establishing itself as a knowledge superpower.

Way Forward:

- ✓ The policy aims for the **all-round growth of every student** in scholastic and co-scholastic domains and emphasises educating the students, teachers, and parents to nurture their potential to serve the nation.
- ✓ Its flexibility allows learners to select their preferred field of study and subsequent path in life following their academic and professional inclination and interests.
- ✓ The policy will **prove extremely beneficial** in dismantling hierarchies and barriers between different knowledge streams by providing easy and accessible methodologies.
- ✓ It will promote co-curricular activities and learning techniques in professional and academic streams. This will pave the way for a **new multi/trans-disciplinary education system**.
- ✓ The NEP will help to replace the rote method of learning and examination-based education with a system based on **conceptual understanding that aims to hone the student's analytical skills**.

5. Online Path to Healthcare

Introduction:

- The **Indian healthcare system** has evolved much over the last decade, owing to the **adoption of new technologies** as well as **systemic changes and emphasis on service quality**. However, healthcare standards are neither uniform nor inclusive across the country.
- At one end of the spectrum, are **state-of-the-art private facilities** with advanced testing and treatment technologies catering primarily to people in urban areas, and on the other, there is a void where the impoverished struggle to receive even the most basic care.
- The COVID-19 crisis has made the cracks in the system appear more prominent.

- **New challenges** are emerging every day, it, therefore, becomes crucial to revisit the problems and chart out a plan to fix them.
- **Low health awareness** can be attributed to **poor education or functional literacy**, as well as **inadequate emphasis** at different levels. However, regional efforts to enhance awareness have generally shown promising results.

Accessibility to quality healthcare among the rural population is another major challenge:

1. For some, travelling to a distant hospital for treatment means losing out on daily wages, and is put off until serious complications arise.



2. A lack of accessibility to healthcare negatively affects health-seeking behaviour and has a delayed but more severe impact on the country's healthcare burden.
3. It is important to **identify and analyse barriers** to access geographical, financial, social and systemic and sensitise people so that long-term action is taken to remove them.
4. Not only do doctors, nurses, medical and technical staff need to be trained, skilled and equipped, but their services have to be equitably distributed across regions. Remote and rural areas are especially plagued with staff shortages.
5. This affects **service quality and availability specialized treatments**. A clear, enforceable policy on human resources is needed to ensure that every single patient in India is taken care of by **sensitive, trained and competent healthcare worker**.
6. Public hospitals that provide low or no-cost services are perceived as unreliable or of indifferent quality. The private sector is usually the first choice for anyone who can afford it.

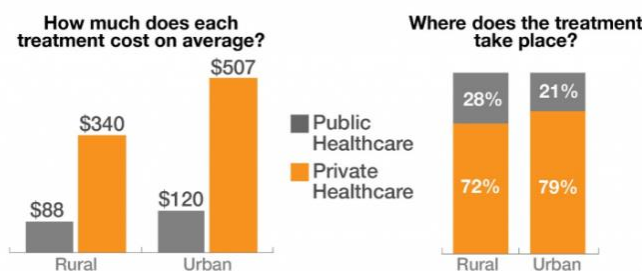
concerns and questions, and Internet access can provide physicians better access to literature.

4. One of those e-health aspects is **remote patient care**, which has made considerable progress in **remote monitoring of ICD patients**.
5. Nevertheless, there is significant physician hesitance about implementing medical computerisation: patient email can potentially overload physicians with additional work, websites can direct patients to poor medical information, the computerised interface can degrade the patient-physician relationship, and health regulations can **create concern over electronic privacy issues**.
6. The finances of e-health appear promising, yet conflicting studies create uncertainty.
7. However, if managed appropriately, the potential disadvantages of e-health can be minimised, and the benefits of e-health in clinical practices can be obtained.

Healthcare sector needs to be cost conscious expenditure on unnecessary tests and procedures must be eliminated:

Public vs private healthcare

Private healthcare in India costs about four times more than the public sector, yet majority of all cases are treated by the private sector.



E-Health: a novel way to redesigning healthcare:

1. **Electronic healthcare (e-health)** will significantly alter the way physicians practise medicine.
2. Electronic medical records with specialised software programs can **increase the quality of patient care**, reduce unnecessary medical tests, and directly connect with pharmacies to transmit prescriptions.
3. Electronic communication allows physicians to respond to patients clinical

1. The **use of oximeters skyrocketed** during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, allowing diagnosed patients to **monitor their oxygen levels at home**, without risking interaction unless necessary.
2. Clear demarcation of processes and procedures are essential to ensure accountability.
3. The problem can be solved by **cultivating communicative and responsible culture**, clarifying expectations and identifying the many other sectors, digital innovation can play a huge role in overcoming challenges in the healthcare sector.
4. On-demand health services, for instance, allow organisations to link doctors to patients via the in-person, web (website or app) or phone mediums. Patients can search for specialists based on their expertise and schedule to book appointments.

5. **Online patient portals** also provide medical test results, diagnosis and give patients detailed explanations of their illnesses, saving doctors precious time.
6. Devices like health rate monitors, exercise and activity trackers and sweat meters allow people to keep track of some aspects of their health without having to visit a doctor. The use of such devices can help flag irregularities at an early stage.

Several hurdles should be taken to have this achieved:

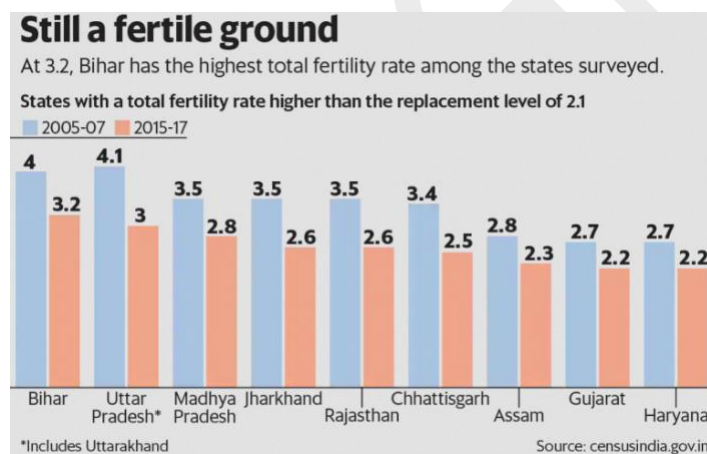
- First, instead of reimbursing individual healthcare providers, it will be necessary to reimburse healthcare systems.
- Second, it is important to recognise possible hesitations by the involved stakeholders.
- Third, it is important that data safety is ensured and monitored by an independent inspectorate.

- Lastly, it is vital that patients are able to refuse the exchange of their data between healthcare providers and that access rights are well described. Of course, the privacy of the patient has to be guaranteed.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Other applications of technology in healthcare range from drone delivery of life-saving medicines, blood components or devices to inaccessible areas to remotely conducted robotic surgeries and even use of augmented reality (AR) glasses that could allow first responders to connect with faraway specialists in a matter of seconds.
- ❖ Depending on the **pace of digital adoption**, these services could resolve issues of accessibility, absence, and possibly even affordability, in the long-term.
- ❖ However, it cannot be overstated that solving basic healthcare challenges is crucial for **ensuring universal health coverage** in a manner that is **equitable, fair and transparent**.

6. India's population data and a tale of two projections



Context:

- A new study, published in the highly regarded journal, **The Lancet**, and prepared by the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), has shaken up the **world of population policy**.
- It argues that while India is destined to be the largest country in the world, its population will peak by mid-century.

- And as the 21st century closes, its ultimate population will be far smaller than anyone could have anticipated, about **1.09 billion** instead of approximately 1.35 billion today. It could even be as low as 724 million.
- The IHME population projections are also subject to underlying assumptions that deserve careful scrutiny. They predict that **by the year 2100**, on average, **Indian women will have 1.29 children**.

Fertility rate of India by 2050 and 2100:

1. Since each woman must have **two children** to replace herself and her husband, this will **result in a sharp population decline**.
2. Contrast this predicted fertility rate of 1.29 for India with the projected cohort fertility

of 1.53 for the United States and 1.78 for France in the same model.

3. It is difficult to believe that Indian parents could be less committed to childbearing than American or French parents
4. **Until 2050**, the IHME projections are almost identical to widely-used United Nations projections.
5. The UN projects that India's population will be 1.64 billion by 2050, the IHME projects 1.61 billion by 2048.
6. It is **only in the second half** of the century that the **two projections diverge** with the UN predicting a population of 1.45 billion by 2100, and the IHME, 1.09 billion.
7. Part of this divergence may come from IHME model's excessive reliance on data regarding current contraceptive use in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and potential for increasing contraceptive use.
8. Research at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) National Data Innovation Centre shows that **contraceptive use in the NFHS is poorly estimated**, and as a result, **unmet need for contraception** may be lower than that estimated by the IHME model, generating implausibly low fertility projections for 2100.

Fertility decline:

- Regardless of whether we subscribe to the UN's projections, or the IHME projections, **India's demographic future** contains a peaking and subsequently **declining population driven by a sharp reduction in fertility**.
- In the 1950s, India's Total fertility rate (TFR) was nearly six children per woman; today it is 2.2.
- Ironically, the massive push for family planning coupled with forced sterilisation during the Emergency barely led to a 17% decline in TFR from 5.9 in 1960 to 4.9 in 1980. However, between 1992 and 2015, it had fallen by 35% from 3.4 to 2.2.

What happened to accelerate fertility decline to a level where 18 States and Union Territories have a TFR below 2, the replacement level?

- One might attribute it to the success of the family planning programme but family planning has long lost its primacy in the Indian policy discourse.
- Between 1975 and 1994, family planning workers had targets they were expected to meet regarding sterilisations, condom distribution and intrauterine device (IUD) insertion.
- Often these targets led to explicit or implicit coercion. Following the **Cairo conference on Population and Development** in 1994, these targets were abandoned.
- If carrots have been dropped, the stick of policies designed to punish people with large families has been largely ineffective.
- **Punitive policies** include denial of maternity leave for third and subsequent births, limiting benefits of maternity schemes and ineligibility to contest in local body elections for individuals with large families.

Aspirational revolution: socio-economic transformation of India:

1. If public policies to encourage the small family norm or to provide contraception have been lackadaisical, what led couples to abandon the ideal of large families?
2. It seems highly probable that the **socioeconomic transformation of India** since the 1990s has played an important role.
3. Over this period, agriculture became an increasingly smaller part of the Indian economy, school and college enrolment grew sharply and individuals lucky enough to find a job in government, multinationals or software services companies reaped tremendous financial benefits.
4. Parents began to **rethink their family-building strategies**. Where farmers used to see more workers when they saw their children, the new aspirational parents see

enrolment in coaching classes as a ticket to success.

5. The **literature on fertility decline** in western countries attributes the decline in fertility to retreat from the family; Indian parents seem to demonstrate increased rather than decreased commitment to family by reducing the number of children and investing more in each child.
6. However, smaller families invest more money in their children by sending them to private schools and coaching classes. It is **not aspirations for self** but that **for children** that seems to **drive fertility decline**.

In language of the past:

- Ironically, even in the face of this **sharp fertility decline** among all segments of Indian society, the public discourse is still rooted in the language of the 1970s and on supposedly high fertility rate, particularly in some areas such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar or among some groups such as women with low levels of education or Muslims.
- This periodically results in politicians **proposing remedies** that would force these ostensibly ignorant or uncaring parents to have fewer children.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Demographic data suggest that the **aspirational revolution** is already under way.
- ❖ What we need to **hasten the fertility decline** is to ensure that the **health and family welfare system** is up to this challenge and provides contraception and sexual and reproductive health services that allow individuals to have only as many children as they want.
- ❖ In order to **maximise the demographic dividend**, we must invest in the education and health of the workforce, particularly in States whose demographic window of opportunity is still more than a decade away.
- ❖ Staying fixated on the notion that revising **State allocation of Central resources** based on current population rather than population from 1971 punishes States with successful population policies is short-sighted.
- ❖ This is because current laggards will be the greatest contributors of the future for everyone, particularly for **ageing populations of early achievers**. Enhancing their productivity will benefit everyone.
- ❖ It is time for India to accept the fact that being the most populous nation is its destiny. It must work towards enhancing the lives of its current and future citizens.

7. Historic ratification: On universal ratification of a labour standard

Context: universal ratification of Convention 182:

- ILO Director General celebrates the **universal ratification of ILO Convention No. 182**, the first ILO Convention in history to **achieve universal ratification**.
- As of this day, children benefit from critical legal protection from the worst forms of child labour in every ILO member State.

- Since its adoption in 1999, ratification of this Convention and **ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age** has ushered in targeted programmes to tackle child labour through education, social protection, and decent work for adults and youth of working age, resulting in a decline in child labour of almost 100 million since 2000.
- The welcome decision by the **Kingdom of Tonga to outlaw the worst forms of child labour** is the **first time** in the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s 101-year



history that a labour standard has been **universally ratified**.

Indian Constitution provisions:

- **Article 21(A) and Article 45** – The child has the right to Education i.e. the state shall provide compulsory and free education to the children of the age six to 14 years.
- **Article 24** – There is a provision under which a child below the age of 14 years cannot be employed in any mine, factory or hazardous workplace.
- **Article 39(f)** – The child's youth and childhood are to be protected against moral and material abandonment and exploitation.

ILO conventions of 182:

1. The **historic first universal ratification of a global labour standard** may be an occasion for celebration; it is nonetheless a moment for sober reflection.
2. The two instruments on child labour are among the eight core ILO Conventions regarded as embodying the spirit of the 1998 declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work.
3. **Convention 182**, which was adopted in the 1999 annual international labour conference, prohibits the sexual exploitation of children, trafficking, deployment in armed conflict and other conditions that compromise their overall well-being.
4. The **Convention complements the ILO's efforts under the 1973 Minimum Age Convention** to prevent the employment of children below a lower age threshold.
5. Under the influence of both these ILO standards, millions of young boys and girls

Global Scourge of Child Labor



REGIONAL PREVALENCE OF CHILD LABOUR

Africa	19.6%
Americas	5.3%
Arab States	2.9%
Asia and the Pacific	7.4%
Europe and Central Asia	4.1%

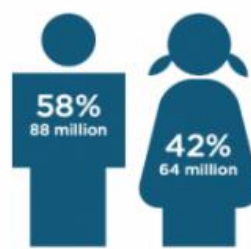


OF THE 152 MILLION CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

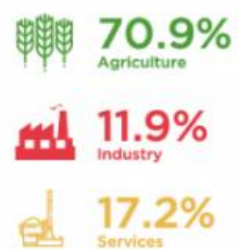
AGE PROFILE



GENDER



ECONOMIC ACTIVITY



International Labor Organization, Global Estimates of Child Labour, Results and Trends, 2012-2016

have been rescued from hazardous conditions of work.

6. Concomitantly, these have resulted in significant increases in enrolments in primary education. The landmark ratification, however, does not detract from the enormity of the challenge that remains.
7. An estimated **152 million are trapped in child labour** and **72 million of them** are engaged in **hazardous work**.
8. If anything, current efforts would have to be stepped up significantly to achieve the **ambitious goal of total abolition of the scourge of child labour by 2025**.
9. But the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening a reversal of recent gains, with widespread job losses, deterioration in conditions of work, decline in household incomes and temporary school closures.

IPEC+ Flagship Programme:

The IPEC+ Flagship Programme brings together **two leading ILO technical cooperation programmes**:

- The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP/FL) – to establish a major new force in the fight against child labour, forced labour and human trafficking.
- It recognizes that these unacceptable forms of work deny workers their basic human rights at work and that, while their overlap concerns 4.5 million children trapped in contemporary forms of slavery, they share root causes of poor governance, discrimination and social exclusion, family and community poverty and lack of access to decent work and to the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining.
- The objective of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme – **in line with target 8.7 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda**, is to provide ILO leadership in global efforts to **eradicate all forms of child labour by 2025** and all forms of contemporary slavery and human trafficking by 2030.
- It also aims to ensure that all people are protected from and can protect themselves against these gross human rights violations.

IPEC+ Flagship Programme and COVID-19:

- COVID-19 has plunged the world into a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale. The harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally.
- They are expected to be most damaging for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, such as children in child labour and victims of forced labour and human trafficking, particularly women and girls.
- These vulnerable groups are more affected by income shocks due to the lack of access to social protection, including health insurance and unemployment benefits.

- IPEC+ Flagship Programme has developed plans to mitigate the risks and to repurpose its strategy and is seeking to allocate additional funding to support efforts to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on child labour and forced labour.

The recently launched brief COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour:

The response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme presents 6 key interventions aimed to reach around 1 million vulnerable children, communities and families in an additional 10 countries:

1. Leveraging our field presence
2. Mobilizing our global and regional networks
3. Producing knowledge and data
4. Investing in gender-responsive monitoring and compliance solutions
5. Building resilience through social dialogue
6. Repurposing and innovating our operations

Yet ILO warns that the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse years of progress. As we look towards **2021, the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour**, ILO emphasises that now is the time to deliver on the promise of Convention 182 and put an end to child labour in all its forms.

Conclusion:

- ❖ In order to contribute to this goal of elimination of Child labour, the **ILO launched Alliance 8.7**, a global partnership designed to align the efforts of those working **towards the achievement of SDG Target 8.7**.
- ❖ **Goal 8** aims to Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- ❖ Instruments relating to the freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation are among the others.
- ❖ These conventions provide the necessary framework to counteract the predominance of informality in the

conditions of work and ought to be a priority for governments.

- ❖ Though belated, India has signalled its legal commitment to the elimination of child labour with its 2017 ratification of Convention 182 and the instrument

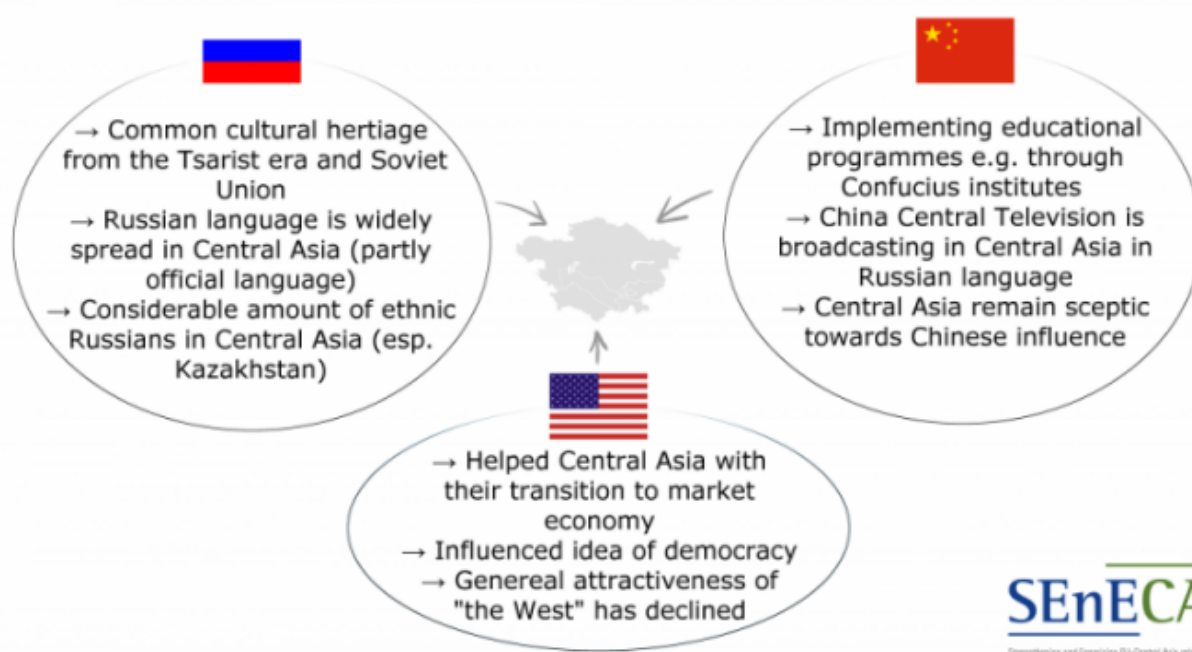
prescribing the minimum age of work for children.

- ❖ As the world prepares to designate **2021 as the year to abolish child labour**, governments must seize the moment to instil hope in the future generations.

8. China-Russia ties as a major determinant

Russia's cultural influence is still the strongest,

...while **China's** influence is increasing and the **American** cultural impact remains low.



Introduction:

- In June 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping described Russian President Vladimir Putin, as “my best friend and colleague”.
- At no time since the founding of the China in 1949 has such public bonhomie been seen between leaders of Russia and China.
- It has sparked intense discussion on whether they are moving in the **direction of a formal alliance**, and what that could mean for the rest of the world.

The key triangle:

- The **triangular relationship between America, China and Russia** has, for the most part, shaped global politics since 1950.
- For the American Cold Warriors, the **road to victory** lay through Peking; today, the Kremlin seems to believe that the road to revival of Russian power and prestige similarly runs through it.
- India is not a part of this triangle; yet they represent our three most consequential relationships.

- Hence, a proper appraisal of the Sino-Russian relationship will be critical to our foreign policy calculus.
- Second, the disintegration of the Soviet Union essentially negated the Russian threat in Chinese eyes. Both these trends will likely continue despite the recent tensions in Sino-U.S. relations.

Columns of the partnership:

- The **three pillars** on which the **Sino-Russian partnership** currently rests are a **peaceful boundary**, **expanding trade** and a **shared distrust of American intentions**.
- Western sanctions have tended to push the Russians closer to China.
- Falling oil prices and fears of new sanctions on Russian gas supplies (Nord Stream 2) are demolishing the core of Russian exports to Europe, thus compelling them to depend to an even greater degree on the Chinese.
- Ironically, even though it is in neither Russia's nor the European Union's interest to hasten a bi-polar world, western actions to punish Russia have served to strengthen China's position in the strategic triangle.

India and Russia ties:

- In recent, there is a case for **India to re-calculate its relationship with Russia**.
- The **politically reliable, trustworthy defence supplier** with shared misgivings about the China, that was the Soviet Union of yore, has long been replaced by a politically agnostic, commercially motivated Russia that no longer shares our concerns about China.
- This might be valid if China is the principal factor in our relations with Russia, but that is not the case.
- It never was even in the 1960s and the 1970s. A strategic partnership with Russia based on the absence of fundamental conflicts of interest and a shared belief that some **form of multipolarity** is better than any sort of Sino-U.S. condominium, is

important for India, and this relationship deserves more attention from both sides.

China-Russia Trade:

1. After the western sanctions, China-Russia trade has more than doubled to \$108 billion.
2. Russia's central bank has **increased its Chinese currency reserves** from less than 1% to over 13%.
3. China has surpassed Germany as the principal supplier of industrial plant and technology.
4. Russia presently enjoys a **nominal trade surplus** but China has a clear advantage going forward.
5. Most of its exports to Russia are now at a **higher technology level** while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.
6. The Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.
7. The investment relationship is done where it suits China's core energy interests, such as the Power of Siberia (a \$400 billion deal over 30 years to supply gas to China from Russian far east along 1,800 miles long pipeline).

Advantage China in trade:

1. As for the economic pillar, while Russia presently enjoys a nominal trade surplus, going beyond gross trade to value-added trade, China has a clear advantage going forward.
2. Most of its exports to Russia are now at a higher technology level while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.
3. At the other end of the spectrum, Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.
4. Despite Chinese promises, the investment relationship remains subdued except where it has suited China's core energy interests, such as the \$400 billion deal over 30 years to supply gas to China along the 1,800 miles long pipeline known as the **Power of Siberia**.
5. Russia remains wary about allowing any dominating role for China in oil and gas. In

fact, over the long term, their economic interests are divergent.

6. Russia presumably thinks to control China through its energy dependency, a situation that the Chinese will not accept; and
7. China feels that it can integrate Russia into its economy by re-directing Russian oil and gas eastwards but, while Russia needs financing, it is unlikely to give up its **economic independence or sovereignty**.

China's rise, Russia's unease:

The growing power-gap is threatening to further reduce Russian influence in their 'near-abroad' and to confine Russia to the periphery of global power.

1. Russia still regards itself as a world power and hopes to be at the centre of a Eurasian arrangement that stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic.
2. It considers U.S.-led hegemony as the primary threat to this vision, and this leads them on to make common cause with China.
3. This does not make Russian concerns about China disappear.
4. Russia is concerned about growing asymmetry and China's pre-eminence even

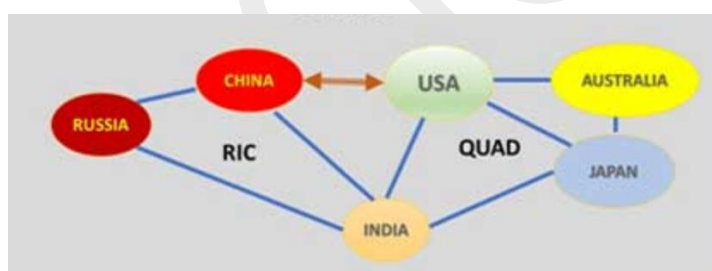
in Central Asia and Arctic regions, and Chinese migration in the Russian Far East.

5. Russia is in real danger of permanently becoming the 'junior partner'.
6. The policymakers in Russia must be concerned about the possibility of China becoming a threat to Russia's territorial integrity.

Conclusion:

- ❖ In the words of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Moscow on September 20, 1982, "the garden of friendship like all gardens must be consistently tended".
- ❖ Some form of **multi-polarity** is better than completely cutting off diplomatic channels.
- ❖ The future course of India's foreign policy will largely depend on the upcoming regime in the U.S. and the level of engagement of China and Russia.
- ❖ The **new reality of Sino-Russian relations** is thus one where substantial expansion of bilateral cooperation is accompanied by growing asymmetry and China's pre-eminence, including in Russian 'backyards' such as Central Asia and the Arctic regions.

9. RIC, a triangle that is still important



Context:

- In recent, India attended a (virtual) meeting of the **Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China (RIC)**.
- Amid the tensions on the Line of Actual Control, the dominant calls were for a more decisive westward shift in India's foreign policy. A RIC meeting seemed incongruous in this setting.

About RIC:

- RIC is a **strategic grouping** that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as "*a counterbalance to the Western alliance*."
- The group was founded on the basis of ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.
- Together, the **RIC countries occupy over 19% of the global landmass and contribute to over 33% of global GDP**.
- The RIC is a **significant multilateral grouping**, because it brings together the

three largest Eurasian countries which are also incidentally geographically contiguous. RIC, hence provides a worthwhile platform to discuss issues like West Asia, Afghanistan, climate change, terrorism, regional connectivity, tensions on Korean Peninsula, etc.

The initial years of transition to multi-polar world:

1. When the RIC dialogue commenced in the early 2000s, the three countries were positioning themselves for a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order.
2. It was not an anti-U.S. construct; all three countries considered their relationship with the United States an essential prop to their global ambitions.
3. The RIC shared some non-West (as distinct from anti-West) perspectives on the global order, such as an emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity, impatience with homilies on social policies and opposition to regime change from abroad.
4. Their support for **democratisation of the global economic and financial architecture** moved to the agenda of BRIC (with the addition of Brazil).
5. The initial years of the RIC dialogue coincided with an upswing in India's relations with Russia and China.
6. The advent of President Vladimir Putin reinforced the political, defence and energy pillars of the **India-Russia strategic partnership**.
7. With China, the 2003 decision to bring a political approach to the boundary dispute and to develop other cooperation, encouraged a **multi-sectoral surge in relations**.
8. An agreement in 2005, identifying political parameters applicable in an eventual border settlement, implicitly recognised India's interests in Arunachal Pradesh.

Strategic Subtext to India-U.S. and Russia-China ties:

1. India's relations with the U.S. surged, encompassing trade and investment, a landmark civil nuclear deal and a burgeoning defence relationship that

met **India's objective of diversifying military acquisitions** away from a near-total dependence on Russia.

2. There was a strategic sub-text: as China was rapidly emerging as a challenger to its global pre-eminence, the U.S. saw value in partnering with a democratic India in Asia.
3. Transformations in the external environment impacted on these political equations.
4. Among other irritants, China went back on the 2005 agreement, launched the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**, worked to undermine India's influence in its neighbourhood and expanded its military and economic presence in the Indian Ocean.
5. The texture of the relationship with Russia also changed, as India-U.S. collaboration widened in **defence and the Indo-Pacific**.
6. As U.S.-Russia relations imploded in 2014 (after the annexation/accession of Crimea), Russia's pushback against the U.S. included cultivating the Taliban in Afghanistan and enlisting Pakistan's support for it.
7. The **western campaign to isolate Russia** drove it into a much closer embrace of China particularly in defence cooperation than their history of strategic rivalry should have permitted.

Russia-India-China Grouping Significance:

1. The Russia-India-China engagement still has significance. India is in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (**SCO**), which is **driven by Russia and China** and includes four Central Asian countries.
2. **Central Asia is strategically located**, bordering our turbulent neighbourhood. A sliver of land separates Tajikistan from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
3. Pakistan's membership of SCO and the potential admission of Iran and Afghanistan (as member states) heighten the **significance of the SCO for India**.
4. **Growing Chinese influence** is testing the informal Russia-China understanding that Russia handles the politico-security issues in the region and China extends economic support.

5. It is important for India to shape the Russia-China dynamics in this region, to the extent possible. The Central Asian countries have signalled they would welcome such a dilution of the Russia-China duopoly.
6. The **ongoing India-Iran-Russia project** for a sea/road/rail link from western India through Iran to Afghanistan and Central Asia, is an important initiative for achieving an **effective Indian presence in Central Asia, alongside Russia and China.**
7. The bilateral arms of the India-Russia-China triangle will also remain important. The **defence and energy pillars** of India's partnership with Russia remain strong.
8. **Access to Russia's abundant natural resources** can enhance our materials security the importance of which has been highlighted by COVID-19. With China too, while the recent developments should accelerate our efforts to bridge the bilateral asymmetries, disengagement is not an option.
9. We have to **work bilaterally and multilaterally on a range of issues**, even while firmly protecting our interests on the border, in technology and the economy.

The Indo-Pacific issue: perspectives of various countries:

- The elephant in the RIC room is the **Indo-Pacific.**
- For India, it is a **geographic space of economic and security importance**, in which a cooperative order should prevent the dominance of any external power.
- China sees our Indo-Pacific initiatives as part of a U.S.-led policy of containing China.
- Russia's Foreign Ministry sees the Indo-Pacific as an American ploy to draw India and Japan into a military alliance against China and Russia.
- India's focus on economic links with the Russian Far East and activation of

a **Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor** may help persuade Russia that its interests in the Pacific are compatible with our interest in diluting Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific; this also accords with President Putin's concept of a **Greater Eurasia.**

Autonomy of action should be part of India's Policy towards China:

- The current India-China stand-off has intensified calls for India to fast-track partnership with the U.S. This is an unexceptionable objective, but is not a silver bullet.
- **National security cannot be fully outsourced.** India's quest for autonomy of action is based on its geographical realities, historical legacies and global ambitions not a residual Cold War mindset.

Conclusion:

- India is committed to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the border areas and RIC would give the platform for resolution of differences (along the Indo-China Border) through dialogue.
- As noted, RIC dynamics are sensitive to the configuration of the U.S.-Russia-China triangle.
- This configuration changed in 2008 (the global economic crisis) and again in 2014 (Crimea's accession to Russia).
- COVID-19 could trigger another change, which could be modulated by the outcome of the U.S. Presidential elections.
- The RIC forms the core of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS as greater cooperation between China, India and Russia would lead to strengthening of both SCO and BRICS.

10. Limited peace: On UAE-Israel peace agreement



Context:

- **Israel and the United Arab Emirates** have announced an agreement that will lead to a **full normalisation of diplomatic relations** between the two states, a move that reshapes the order of West Asia politics from the Palestinian issue to Iran.
- The **peace agreement** reached between **Israel and the United Arab Emirates** has formalised the thaw in Arab-Israeli relations that has been under way for a few years. As part of the deal announced by U.S.
- President Trump, the UAE would recognise the state of Israel and establish **formal diplomatic relations**, while Israel would halt its controversial plan to annex swathes of the Palestinian West Bank.
- The agreement will be known as the **Abraham Accords**.

Overview of the agreement:

- **Trilateral agreement:** The agreement was the product of lengthy discussions **between Israel, the UAE and the US** that accelerated recently.
- Under the accord, Israel has agreed to suspend annexing areas of the occupied West Bank as it had been planning to do.

- It also firms up opposition to regional power Iran, which the UAE, Israel and the US view as the main threat in the region.

Peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates:

1. The **UAE has become the first Gulf Arab state** to do so and **only the third Arab nation** to have active diplomatic ties with Israel.
2. Egypt made a peace deal with Israel in 1979, followed by Jordan in 1994.
3. Under the deal, Israel would suspend its plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.
4. The **West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan**. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine.
5. Israel took control of it in the Six-day **Arab-Israeli war, 1967** and has over the years established settlements there.
6. A joint statement from the USA, the UAE and Israel has been issued which says that delegations would meet in the coming weeks to sign deals on direct flights, security, telecommunications, energy, tourism and health care.
7. Both nations will also partner on fighting the Covid-19 pandemic together.
8. It remains unclear what prompted Israel and the UAE to make the announcement now.
9. In June 2020, the UAE's ambassador to the USA warned that Israel's plan to annex the Jordan Valley and other parts of the occupied West Bank would upend Israel's efforts to improve ties with Arab nations.

It is a **landmark agreement** given that the UAE is only the third Arab country and the first in the Gulf recognising Israel.

- It could pave the way for the region's Sunni Arab kingdoms and the Jewish-majority Israel **enhancing regional cooperation** against their common foe, Shia Iran.

- Israel has said it would focus on “expanding ties with other countries in the Arab and Muslim world”, while the U.S. has expressed hope that more Arab countries would follow the UAE’s lead — Arab-Israeli relations have largely been conflict-ridden ever since the state of Israel was declared in 1948.
- The U.S. had arranged several meetings between Israeli and Emirati officials last year, which probably laid the foundations for the agreement.

Why has UAE signed a peace deal with Israel?

- While the deal has the potential to change Arab-Israeli relations for good, it also shows how the Arab countries are gradually **decoupling themselves** from the Palestine question.
- The **UAE offered full diplomatic recognition** in return for Israel’s suspension of a planned annexation, not for any relaxation of the actual occupation.
- As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, Israel made peace with an Arab country without “our returning to the 1967 borders”.
- **The Arab Peace Initiative**, a Saudi Arabia initiative endorsed by the Arab League, offered recognition to Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the occupied territories.
- Ironically, the UAE’s peace agreement comes close on the heels of the Trump administration’s back-to-back decisions to recognise **Jerusalem as Israel’s capital** and **its sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights**.
- Clearly, the UAE has moved away from the Arab initiative. The question now is whether the Emiratis would be able to press the Jewish state to relax its inhuman and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and start talks between the occupier and the occupied.
- If it cannot, the UAE-Israel deal would be of little significance for the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership, on its part, should

understand the emerging reality in West Asia — the Arab-Israel conflict is coming to a close, but the Palestine-Israel conflict is to continue without any respite.

India hails UAE-Israel pact, reiterates Palestine cause:

- India has consistently **supported peace, stability and development in West Asia**, which is our **extended neighbourhood**.
- In that context, India welcome the full normalization of ties between UAE and Israel.
- New Delhi will also need to watch ties with Iran, which has slammed the agreement and will see Arab-Israeli tie-ups as a direct threat to its security.
- The deal opens up new opportunities for India to play a much larger role in the regional security and stability in the Gulf, where New Delhi enjoys special relations with both Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.
- This is a region where India has deep stakes in **terms of energy supplies and expatriate populations**.

India should use this unexpected opportunity to give itself a bigger role in a region which is its strategic backyard.

1. The first step should be to ramp up **defence and security relations with UAE**.
2. Israel is already a very close defence partner. But India should restart joint exercises with UAE, and even Saudi Arabia.
3. While some work has already happened, India should leverage its economy for a bigger opening in this region.
4. Importantly, India can use its good offices to ensure that any future deal on a **regional security framework** gives adequate space to Iran, which may be weak
5. but not so weak that it cannot be a hugely disruptive power if it so chooses. **A balance between Shia and Sunni**, between Persian and Arab, is key to any sustainable peace.
6. In recent years, China has indicated its willingness to play a larger role in this

region, and is close to both UAE and Israel and, increasingly, Saudi Arabia.

Major diplomatic victory for USA:

- The timing of the agreement is also significant. It gives a major diplomatic victory for President Trump a few months before election.
- **Mr. Trump's Iran policy** failed to clinch any result. His outreach to North Korea is **still inconclusive**.
- The **U.S. is withdrawing from Afghanistan** at a time when the Taliban is on surge.
- The **U.S.'s ties with China** have hit rock bottom. President Trump wanted a diplomatic victory, and his closest allies in West Asia, of course driven by regional factors, have given him one.

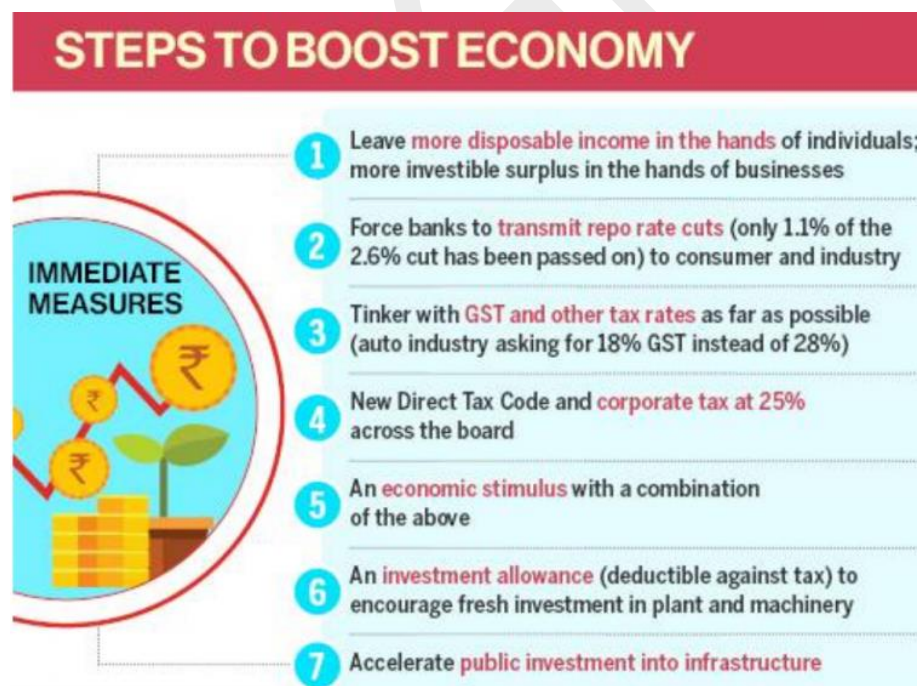
- If more Arab countries open ties with Israel in the coming months, President Trump could claim a **major diplomatic breakthrough** in the **Arab-Israeli relations**, which had seen at least four major wars in the past.

Conclusion:

- ❖ India should make its moves before this market and this extended neighbourhood come under the Chinese sphere of influence.
- ❖ The deal marks a historic day and a significant **step forward for peace** in the Middle East.
- ❖ Opening direct ties between two of the Middle East's most dynamic societies and advanced economies will transform the region by spurring economic growth, enhancing technological innovation and forging closer people-to-people relations.

GENERAL STUDIES III

1. Rebuild India's confidence, revive the economy



Context:

- These are **extraordinarily difficult times** for our nation and the world. People are

gripped with the **fear of disease and death from COVID-19**.

• This fear is ubiquitous and transcends geography, religion and class. The inability of nations to control the spread of the novel coronavirus and the lack of a confirmed cure for the disease have exacerbated people's concerns.

• Such a heightened sense of anxiety among people can cause tremendous upheavals in the functioning of societies.

• Consequently, **disruption of the normal social order** will inevitably impact livelihoods and the larger economy.

An event with deep impact:

- Economic contraction is not merely a GDP number for economists to analyse and debate. It means a **reversal of many years of progress**.
- A significant number among the weaker sections of our society may slip back into poverty, a rare occurrence for a developing nation.
- Many enterprises may shut down. An entire generation may be lost due to severe unemployment.
- A contracting economy can adversely impact our ability to feed and educate our children owing to a shortage of financial resources. The deleterious impact of an economic contraction is long and deep, especially on the poor.

On NREGA and cash support:

- There is **extreme duress** among India's poor. At a time when agriculture activity has been robust, data show that just in the month of June, 62 million people demanded work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme at minimum wages.
- This is thrice the usual number and 10 times more than the total number employed by the entire listed corporate sector.
- It is evident that most of them are **displaced non-agricultural workers**, struggling to make ends meet.
- Such is the scale and enormity of despair in our labour force. Fortuitously, the MGNREGA programme has proved to be a bedrock of support in such times but it is not enough.
- A **meaningful cash transfer** can restore confidence in these families. Money in the hands of people can provide an **immediate sense of security and confidence**, which is the cornerstone to restoring economic normalcy.

- India is perhaps the only large democracy that has not provided direct cash assistance of a significant amount during the COVID-19 crisis.
- There seems to be a **misplaced sense of apprehension** that providing large cash assistance may deter people from returning to the workforce when needed and starve industry of labour. Such fears are stale and unfounded.
- In the **United States**, as per reports, **nearly three-quarters** of unemployed workers received higher pay and benefits under their government's COVID-19 assistance than from their employers.
- But this has not prevented American industry from reopening. While it is inordinately late, it is still prudent to provide a significant sum as direct cash assistance to the poor which can inject confidence in them to weather this COVID-19 storm.

Look at the financial system: Restore confidence in the Financial system:

1. There is also a **dire need to restore confidence in the financial system** which acts as the **vital lubricant for the economy**.
2. COVID-19 assistance measures undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government such as interest rate reductions, credit guarantee and liquidity enhancement schemes are welcome steps, but they have largely failed since banks are not confident of lending.
3. Reviving the health of the banking sector is not merely about capital infusion or disinvestment of public sector banks.
4. Allowing institutions such as the RBI, public sector banks, bankruptcy boards, securities and insurance regulators **to function freely and professionally** is the foundational step to restoring confidence in the financial system.
5. It is **critical to allow processes** such as the insolvency process to function smoothly without intervention.
6. If there is confidence among people to spend and among bankers to lend, then the



private sector will spontaneously derive the confidence to reopen and invest.

7. When firms feel **confident of availability of capital and consumers**, they do not need much else to kick-start production and investment.
8. **Corporate tax cuts**, such as the one announced last year, are misguided luxuries that will neither boost private investment nor are fiscally affordable.
9. **Knee-jerk reaction** such as protection of Indian industry through trade restrictions cannot catalyse economic activity immediately but instead, is a dangerous reversal of established industrial policy that has generated enormous economic gains over the last three decades.
10. A **large direct cash assistance to people**, improving capital adequacy of banks and providing credit guarantee schemes for corporates require significant financial resources.
11. Government finances are already stretched with a major shortfall in revenues.
12. **New avenues for tax revenues are not feasible** in the short term. Higher borrowing by the government is inevitable.
13. India cannot afford to be **too fiscally restrained** in these distressing times.

Way out: Borrow from International Institutions or deficit monetisation by RBI:

1. India must make full use of loan programmes of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
2. Our long track record as an **impeccable borrower with no default**, timely repayments and **full transparency** make us an ideal borrower for these institutions.
3. However, these will not suffice, and the government needs to borrow more.
4. Some have opined that India should hark back to the **old ways of deficit monetisation by the RBI**, also known as printing money.
5. This is understandable given the current unforeseen circumstances. But we must be cognisant of the unhealthy impulses that

seemingly free money creates for governments.

6. **Deficit monetisation imposes high intangible and institutional costs**, as we have experienced in the past.
7. It is perhaps prudent to adopt deficit monetisation as the last resort when all other options are exhausted.
8. India is confronted with a dangerous trinity of military, health and economic threats.
9. India entered the COVID-19 crisis in a precarious position, with slowing growth, rising unemployment and a choked financial system. The epidemic has manifestly made it more painful.

Conclusion:

- ❖ It is thus imperative to act with utmost urgency to nurse the economy back to good health.
- ❖ The slowdown in economic activity is both a function of external factors such as the lockdown and behavioural changes of people and enterprises, driven by fear.
- ❖ The foundation for reviving our economy is **to inject confidence back in the entire ecosystem**. People must feel confident about their lives and livelihoods.
- ❖ Entrepreneurs must feel **confident of reopening and making investments**. Bankers must feel confident about providing capital. Multilateral organisations must feel confident enough to provide funding to India.
- ❖ **Sovereign ratings agencies** must feel confident about India's ability to fulfil its financial obligations and restore economic growth.

Way Forward: Setting things right:

- ✓ It is important to enlarge one's diagnosis of India's economic woes from mere GDP numbers to the underlying sentiments of fear, uncertainty and insecurity prevalent in people, firms and institutions.
- ✓ Restoring confidence in people through **direct cash assistance** and other

welfare programmes can help them live their lives and spend.

- ✓ Restoring confidence among bankers through **autonomy of institutions and processes** will help them lend.
- ✓ Restoring confidence among businesses with **greater access to capital** will help them invest and create jobs.
- ✓ Restoring confidence among international organisations by **re-establishing the**

credibility of our institutions will help get funding assistance and objective sovereign ratings.

- ✓ Without being lured into complacency over illusionary recovery of headline numbers, the path to **India's sustained economic revival** is through the philosophical pursuits of **improving confidence and sentiments** of all in our society, using the **economic tools of fiscal and monetary policies**.

2. The govt and RBI face a trilemma regarding PSBs

Introduction:

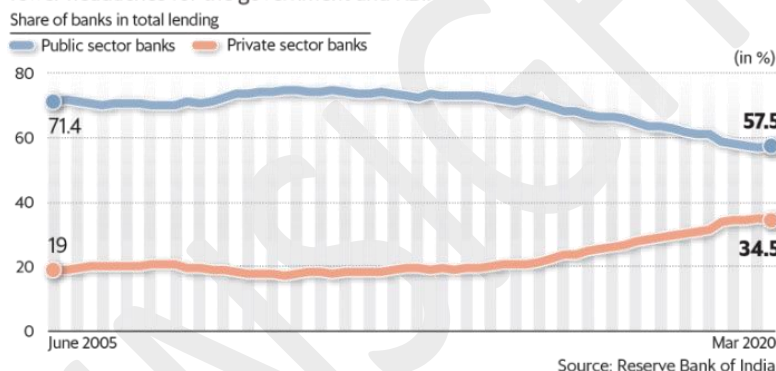
- Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel in his **new book Overdraft Saving the Indian Saver**, talks about a **trilemma facing** the Indian central bank and the government, when it comes to the public sector banking system in India.

Only two out of the three can be achieved:

1. Predominant public sector and independent regulation by RBI.
2. Predominant public sector and adherence to debt to GDP targets.

Losing proportion

Over the last decade, the share of PSBs in the overall lending basket has dropped sharply from 75.1% to 57.5% at present. As PSBs keep losing share, they will cause fewer headaches for the government and RBI.



Let's say the government wants the public sector banks (PSBs) to dominate the banking system and at the same time ensure that the **public debt doesn't go up**.

What will happen in such a circumstance?

- In this scenario, the Reserve Bank will have to **compromise on independent regulation**.
- To dominate the banking system, PSBs will have to **increase lending at a fast pace**.
- This will lead to **accumulation of bad loans** or loans that haven't been repaid for 90 days or more.
- Given that the recoveries of bad loans are minimal, the government, as the owner, will have to invest more money into the PSBs to keep them going.
- If the government puts more money into the PSBs, its **expenditure will go up**. It will have to borrow more money and the **public debt to GDP ratio will substantially rise**.

What is the trilemma about?

The sovereign (government) and the regulator (RBI) face a trilemma: It is clear that it is not possible to:

1. Have dominance of government banks (public sector banks) in the banking sector;
2. Retain independent regulation; and
3. Adhere to public debt-gross domestic product (GDP) targets.

The government along with RBI cannot hope to **achieve all three points at the same time**.

How can public debt to GDP ratio be saved from rising?

- The central bank will have to **dilute some regulations** to help the PSBs in not recognizing bad loans.
- In such a case, the government need not invest in the PSBs immediately. PSBs will have a **greater market share** and the public debt to GDP ratio will not rise right away. However, the central bank will have to dilute banking regulations.

What is the issue with RBI diluting norms?

- When RBI dilutes regulations, banks end up kicking the bad loans can down the road.
- This **postponement leads to a bigger problem**, which hits the banks, not immediately, but a few years later.
- This is precisely how PSBs accumulated **peak bad loans of ₹8.96 trillion**, as of March 2018.
- The government then has to **recapitalize the banks** in the years to come. In the process, it pushes the **public debt to GDP ratio up**. This is one situation that the government has been trying hard to avoid.

Arguments for reducing government dominance on Public Sector Banks (PSBs):

- The basic argument that has been making has **its roots in the discourse on banking reform and reducing dominant state ownership and control** over the banks.
- There is an assumption that state-owned banks have a sovereign guarantee and, therefore, safe from the depositors' perspective. But sovereign ownership also creates a sense of performance complacency.
- The punishment by the stock market for non-performance is blunt but it does not ostensibly harm the dominant shareholder.

- It is the **minority shareholder who suffers at the first instance** and then (if the insulation of the sovereign is removed) the saver.
- However, if there is a large overlap between savers and tax payers then they are paying the price for saving themselves at one end even as the cost of finance for the economy does not go down.
- The cost of non-performing assets and administrative overheads ultimately has to be **recovered from the profits** — a reason that indicates that **interest rate cuts do not get transmitted**.

Conclusion: Eventual way out for RBI and government:

- ❖ The decline in the share of government banks in the banking sector should not be resisted.
- ❖ Current trends broadly suggest that the banking sector is **increasingly privatized**, by stealth, much like the telecom sector.
- ❖ In the last decade, the share of PSBs in overall lending has dropped sharply from 75.1% to 57.5% at present.
- ❖ As PSBs keep losing share, they will cause fewer headaches for the government and the central bank in the decades to come.
- ❖ While India does face this trilemma as proposed by the former governor, unchecked privatization may not be the solution.
- ❖ A **balanced approach is needed** where the resolution process of financial failure of private banks needs to be evolved. These norms must address how to secure depositor interests.



3. Re-imagining and reinventing the Indian economy

IN A DIFFICULT PLACE

Covid-19 has hit India when the economy is slowing down

Slow Growth

NSO expects India's GDP growth to be 5% in 2019-20, the slowest in 11 years

Blighted Job Market:

Unemployment at a historic high amid few new jobs and many layoffs

Crises Abound

Since 2016, demonetisation, GST glitches and credit crisis have taken a toll

Weak Demand

Job drought and muted wages have dented consumer sentiments & demand

difficult to operate without adequate availability of credit.

- This is especially true for India's 60,000-odd start-ups which are facing an acute liquidity crunch. The situation presents an opportunity to take bold action to promote investments, protect existing jobs and create new jobs.

Context:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has **disrupted the global economy** and India is no different.
- The significant reduction in domestic demand caused by the nationwide lockdown has pushed the economy towards contraction in the first quarter of 2020-21, and the impact is likely to be felt in subsequent months as well.
- In this regard, PM Shri Narendra Modi has taken decisive and commendable action to mitigate the impact of the virus outbreak, from both a health and an economic perspective.

Coronavirus stimulus package totalling ₹20 lakh crore:

- The inability of nations to control the spread of the novel coronavirus and the lack of a confirmed cure for the disease have exacerbated people's concerns.
- Such a heightened sense of anxiety among people can cause tremendous upheavals in the functioning of societies.
- Consequently, disruption of the normal social order will inevitably impact livelihoods and the larger economy.
- On May 12, 2020, Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a mammoth coronavirus stimulus package totalling ₹20 lakh crore, which works out to about 10% of GDP, making it one of the most substantial relief plans in the world.
- The revised stimulus package can help revive businesses, which are finding it

The strategy should address four major economic cylinders:

- a) **Big Business Houses** which are a major contributor to GDP and large employment generators.
- b) **MSMEs** which are the lifeline of the country, generating wealth for the middle class.
- c) **Start-ups** which bring innovation and transformation to our country's economy.
- d) Our Indian Brothers and Sisters living abroad, the **NRIs and OCIs** — they not only serve as unofficial ambassadors of India, but their heart beats for India and through their contacts, can bring huge investments into India.

Suggestions:

Big Business Houses:

1. Big business houses should be supported by the government to **reopen their operations** by way of **tax incentives or ease of procurement** of raw materials or other goods and services on credit as this will energise consumer demand and boost the functioning of vendor or ancillary industry in the MSME sector (which has huge potential for job creation).
2. The RBI should consider **Single One Time Window for restructuring business loans**, as required, by all banks.

There is a high probability that non-performing assets are likely to rise once the prevailing moratorium is lifted by RBI. The government and RBI also urgently need to assure banks, that their business decisions

will not be questioned, to encourage credit flows.

3. The Centre can prepare a **five-year plan** on getting at least 60 per cent of those companies, desiring to move manufacturing out of China to India.

For MSMEs:

1. **Making India a global trading hub** – devise an incentive regime for companies setting up global trading operations from India.
2. The States should think of **establishing self-contained “industrial cities”** that earmark space for manufacturing, commercial, educational, residential and social infrastructure.
3. The **10 sectors** identified by the government fit into the Make in India campaign — electrical, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, automotive, mining, electronics, heavy engineering, renewable energy, food processing, chemicals and textiles. Japan, the U.S. and South Korea have already shown interest.

For Start-ups:

1. It should also **encourage sunrise sectors** as part of re-imagining Indian economy such as battery manufacturing (storage systems)/ solar panel manufacturing.
2. The government can also consider **giving impetus to “Deep Tech”-leveraged businesses** — blockchain, robotics, AI, machine learning, augmented reality, big data analytics, cyber security, etc.
3. India is amongst the **top start-up ecosystems globally**. Several of them are in pre-Angel or Angel-Funding stages and are under significant pressure to stay afloat in view of a lack of adequate liquidity.
4. Start-ups not only help drive innovation, but **also create jobs**, which will be very important going forward. The government needs to provide significant support to the start-up ecosystem.

5. The **auto industry** which **contributes significantly to GDP (nearly 9%)** deserves special treatment.

6. In addition to reducing GST rate, old vehicle scrap policy with tax incentives for creating a demand for new vehicles may be formulated. There is need to recognise Auto Sales Industry channel partners as MSMEs

7. **Plug-and-Play model:** Maharashtra has created a turnkey ‘plug-and-play’ model for foreign investors. Similarly, other States must get their act together, be it on land acquisition, labour laws and providing social, environment and other infrastructure. Land should be made available for projects with all necessary pre-clearances — at Centre’s level (including Environmental), State’s and Municipal dispensations.

8. **Reforms in labour laws** do not only mean permission to hire and fire. Leeway should be given to strictly enforce discipline within the factory premises and demand higher productivity.

The moves by U.P., M.P. and Gujarat are welcome signals. The government should provide health insurance for migrant labourers as experimented by certain States.

To bring huge investments into India:

Investments of NRIs and OCIs in India should be treated on par with those of Resident Indians as regards interest and dividend repatriation and management control of Indian companies.

- It may be mentioned that the Chinese government had called on rich overseas Chinese to invest in China with minimum government control, and massive investments followed. This has contributed to China’s prosperity and economic rise. A similar investment boom can take place in India through NRIs and OCIs who have the resources and expertise in manufacturing and technology.
- Indian diaspora’s direct investment should be incentivised, perhaps in terms of a plug-and-play model to ensure that they do not

end up spending lots of time in getting approvals to start a business

- **One-time repatriation of foreign earning:** The proposition is to reduce the current rate of 15% on a gross basis on dividends from foreign subsidiaries to 5%. This would lead to more influx of funds and thereby be expected to support local projects.
- The government may also consider providing tax exemption on passive income like dividends, interest on bank deposits, income from mutual funds earned by NRIs from India, if such income is reinvested back in India. Also, capital gains should be taxed at 50% of applicable rates for next 3 years.
- **Incentives for attracting new Investments:** We need to reconsider the approach to taxing interest, dividends and royalty paid to overseas investors.
- For instance, though interest on several forms of debt qualifies for a concessional 5% tax rate, this is limited by fairly stringent thin capitalization norms.
- The government could consider a 3 to 5-year moratorium on the applicability of thin capitalization norms to ensure that businesses are able to leverage on low cost borrowings from group entities abroad.
- The government may consider relaxation of norms pertaining to issue of shares to resident entities owned by NRIs.

- Further, relaxation should be provided for any funds received from NRIs, subject to production of simple documents such as Bank Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate (FIRC) /KYC documents.

An **Off-Shore investment centre** like Singapore can be opened in Mumbai where Indian domestic laws and taxation will not be applicable.

- MNCs may route their investments into India **through the Off-Shore Centre in Mumbai.**
- Foreign legal firms and banks along with domestic institutions can be invited to have a presence in the Off-Shore Centre.

Conclusion:

- ❖ A lot more needs to be done, however, to resuscitate the country's growth engine.
- ❖ At this critical juncture, what **India needs is a two-pronged strategy** to successfully navigate the current crisis and recover strongly thereafter.
- ❖ First, minimise the damage caused by the COVID and clear a path to recovery and second, rebooting and re-imaging India by promptly exploiting new opportunities unleashed by evolving business scenarios.
- ❖ The three mantras should be **Bigger, Bolder and Faster execution of this strategy.**

4. India does need a Fiscal Council



Introduction:

- The fiscal situation in India has been under **severe stress** even before COVID-19 and the **novel coronavirus pandemic** has only worsened it.
- The **fiscal deficit of the Centre in 2019-20** as estimated by the Controller

General of Accounts (CGA) **was 4.6%**, 0.8 percentage point higher than the revised estimate.

- For the current year, even without any additional fiscal stimulus, the **deficit is estimated at about 7% of GDP** as against 3.5% estimated in the Budget due to a sharp decline in revenues.
- The **consolidated deficit** of the Union and States could be as **high as 12% of GDP** and the **overall debt could go up to 85%**.
- When off Budget liabilities are considered, the situation looks even more alarming.

Need for transparency: report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in 2018:

1. There are questions of comprehensiveness, transparency and accountability in the Budgets.
2. The practice of repeated postponement of targets, timely non-settlement of bill payments and off Budget financing to show lower deficits has been common.
3. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in 2018 on the compliance of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act for 2016-17, highlights various obfuscations done to keep the liabilities hidden.
4. These include special banking arrangements for covering arrears of fertilizer subsidy, issuing short-term bonds, unsecured loans and borrowing from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) by the Food Corporation of India towards meeting food subsidy and its arrears.
5. Financing irrigation projects from the Long-Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) created by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and financing of railway projects through borrowings from the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) are just some examples.

Various commission's recommendations:

- In order to make the **Budgets comprehensive, transparent and accountable**, the **13th Finance**

Commission recommended that a committee be appointed by the Ministry of Finance which should eventually **transform itself into a Fiscal Council** to "conduct an **annual independent public review of FRBM compliance**, including a review of the fiscal impact of policy decisions on the FRBM roadmap".

- The FRBM Review Committee too made a similar recommendation underlining the need for an independent review by the Finance Ministry appointing the Council.
- Therefore, the 14th Finance Commission recommended the **establishment of an independent Fiscal Council** which should be appointed by and reporting to Parliament by inserting a new section in the FRBM Act.

The mandate of Independent Fiscal Council:

- A **Fiscal Council** is an **independent fiscal institution (IFI)** with a mandate to promote stable and sustainable public finances.
- A fiscal council is defined as, "...a publicly funded entity staffed by non-elected professionals mandated to provide nonpartisan oversight of fiscal performance and/or advice and guidance — from either a positive or normative perspective — on key aspects of fiscal policy".

These institutions assist in calibrating sustainable fiscal policy by making an objective and scientific analysis.

1. First, an **unbiased report to Parliament** helps to raise the level of debate and brings in greater transparency and accountability.
2. Second, **costing of various policies and programmes** can help to promote transparency over the political cycle to discourage populist shifts in fiscal policy and improve accountability.
3. Third, **scientific estimates** of the cost of programmes and assessment of forecasts could help in raising public awareness about their fiscal implications and make people understand the nature of budgetary constraint.

4. Finally, the Council will work as a **conscience keeper in monitoring rule-based policies**, and in raising awareness and the level of debate within and outside Parliament.

The important tasks of these independent fiscal institution (IFI)s:

- Independent analysis, review and monitoring and evaluating of government's fiscal policies and programmes;
- Developing or reviewing macroeconomic and/or budgetary projections;
- Costing of budget and policy proposals and programmes; and presenting policy makers with alternative policy options.
- Over the years, monitoring compliance with fiscal rules and costing policies and programmes have become major tasks of these councils.

The **OECD (2013)** has documented the **important principles needed for successful fiscal councils under nine broad heads** and these are:

- local ownership; independence and non-partisanship; mandate; resources; relationship with legislature; access to information; transparency; communication and external evaluation.
- These principles are important, ensure autonomy, being unbiased, transparency, and effective and accountable Councils.

Independent fiscal institution (IFI): Diverse role, more acceptance:

- According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there were 36 countries with **independent fiscal institution (IFI)s** in 2014 and more have been established since.
- Although their **common agenda** has been to **function as watchdogs**, there is considerable **diversity in their structure and functions**.

How effective have these institutions been?

- A study by the IMF, documents that the existence of **independent fiscal institution (IFI)s** is associated with **stronger primary balances**;
- countries with IFIs tend to have more accurate macroeconomic and budgetary forecasts;
- IFIs are likely to **raise public awareness** and raise the level of public debate on fiscal policy.

Case studies in Belgium, Chile and the United Kingdom show that IFIs have significantly contributed to improved fiscal performances:

1. In Belgium, the government is legally required to adopt the macroeconomic forecasts of the Federal Planning Bureau and this has significantly helped to reduce bias in these estimates.
2. In Chile, the existence of two independent bodies on Trend GDP and Reference Copper Price has greatly helped to improve Budget forecasts.
3. In the U.K., the Office for Budget Responsibility has been important in restoring fiscal sustainability.
4. Cross-country evidence shows that **fiscal councils exert a strong influence on fiscal performances**, particularly when they have formal guarantees of independence.

The final word: What do we do when the governments fail?

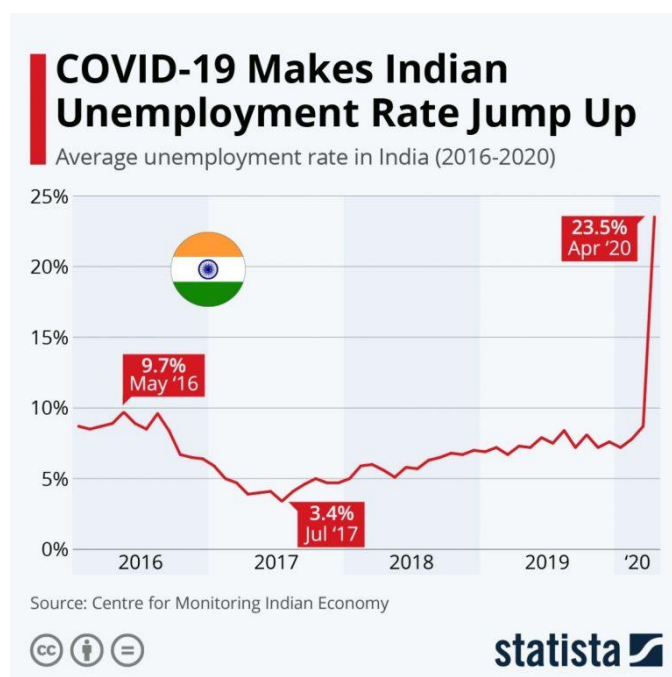
- It is here that we need systems and institutions to ensure checks and balances.
- In that respect, a **Fiscal Council** is an **important institution** needed to complement the **rule-based fiscal policy**.
- Of course, it is not a 'silver bullet'; if there is no political will, the institution would be less effective, and **if there is political will, there is no need for such an institution**.
- That is also true of the FRBM Act. While we cannot state that the FRBM Act has been an unqualified success, it has also not been an abject failure either.

- The counterfactual will show that things would have been much worse without it, and it has *helped to raise the awareness of government, legislators and the public at large.*

Conclusion:

- ❖ Similarly, the **Fiscal Council will help in improving comprehensiveness, transparency and accountability.**
- ❖ While the prevailing exceptional circumstance warrants loosening of purse strings, it is necessary that the government must return to a **credible fiscal consolidation path** once the crisis gets over.

5. Differential impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown



- While the validity of Scheidel's argument for the current pandemic can only be assessed after it is over, the pandemic has been described as a leveller more loosely, both because the disease can strike anyone, and also because the resultant lockdowns have led to widespread **job losses and economic hardships** across the range of the income and occupational distribution.

Widespread job losses: The marginalised sections are at risk

1. Early evidence from the United Kingdom and the United States reveals that racial and ethnic minorities are indeed the ones most likely at the risk of unemployment.
2. Focusing on the looser description of the pandemic as a leveller, preliminary data and early indirect evidence from several parts of the world indicate that the **incidence of the disease is not class-neutral**: poorer and economically vulnerable populations are more likely to contract the virus as well as to die from it.
3. To the extent, **economic class and social identity** (e.g. race, ethnicity or caste) **overlap**, this suggests that socially marginalised groups would be at higher risk of mortality due to COVID-19.
4. The risks extend beyond mortality as the economic consequences of the current pandemic are likely to be most concentrated among the low wage earners, and less educated workers, segments of the

Introduction:

- In book, **The Great Leveler**, Walter Scheidel, the Austrian economic historian, argues that **throughout human history**, there have been **four types of catastrophic events** that have led to greater economic equality: pandemic, war, revolution and state collapse.
- Currently, the world is going through one of them: a **massive COVID-19 pandemic**.
- In Scheidel's analysis, the decline in inequality is a result of excess mortality that raises the price of labour.

labour force where racial and ethnic minorities are over-represented.

5. Thus, we cannot comment on whether certain caste groups are more vulnerable to the virus than others.

The Indian shutdown: Differential impact on various castes:

1. A key element of the pandemic control strategy everywhere has been to shut down economic and social activity, and to impose social distancing with varying degrees of strictness.
2. India's lockdown, imposed in the last week of March 2020, was among the most stringent.
3. The first month of the severe lockdown, April 2020, witnessed a **sharp rise in unemployment**.
4. We examine shifts in employment and unemployment rates using data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)'s Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) database.
5. We find that the proportion of employed upper castes dropped from 39% to 32% between December 2019 and April 2020, a fall of seven percentage points.
6. The corresponding fall for Scheduled Castes (SCs) was from 44% to 24%, e. a fall of 20 percentage points, almost three times as large.
7. For intermediate castes, Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Tribes (STs) the fall was from 42% to 34%, 40% to 26% and 48% to 33%. Thus, the fall in employment for SCs and STs was far greater in magnitude than that for upper castes.

Education as a protective factor:

- The global evidence suggests that job losses associated with COVID-19 are much more concentrated among individuals with **low levels of education** and those with vulnerable jobs with **no tenure or security**.
- We find that individuals with more secure jobs, i.e. not daily wagers, and those with **more than 12 years of education**, were much less likely to be unemployed in

April 2020 than those with less than 12 years of education and with daily wage jobs, relative to their pre-pandemic employment status.

- Thus, **education** did turn out to be a **protective factor** in the first wave of immediate post-lockdown job losses.

Caste gaps at higher levels of education:

1. Earlier work reveals that **caste gaps at higher levels of education** have either remained static or widened over the last three decades.
2. The **current pandemic** is further likely to exacerbate these educational differences.
3. Data from another nationally representative survey, the India Human Development Survey for 2011-12 (IHDS-II) show that 51% of SC households have adult women who have zero years of education, i.e. are illiterate, and 27% have an illiterate adult male member.
4. These proportions are in stark contrast to Upper Caste (UC) households, where the corresponding proportions are 11% and 24%, respectively.
5. Thus, in the face of current school closures, parents of SC children would be much less equipped to assist their children with any form of home learning, compared to parents of UC children.
6. This would be the case both because of educational differences among parents as well as due to other significant differences in material conditions living.

Issue of technology access to various sections of society:

- There are **many dimensions** that reveal **continued disparity** between **caste groups**, which would affect the ability of Dalit and Adivasi families to access online education.
- For example, the proportion of households with access to the Internet is 20% and 10% for UC and SC households, respectively. Only 49% of SCs have bank savings, as compared to 62% of UC households.

- Thus, **differential access to information technology**, as well as **disparities in the ability to invest in technology** will be critical in shaping access to online education, if the pandemic forces schools to close for a substantial period of time.

Conclusion:

- Early impacts of the **pandemic-induced lockdown** indicate that the resultant economic distress is exacerbating pre-existing structures of disadvantage based on social identity, and **investments in education and health** that close gaps between social groups would be **essential to build resilience in the face of future shocks**.

6. PM-KISAN is not reaching all farmer households as intended

Introduction:

- The **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)** is the first universal basic income-type of scheme targeted towards landed farmers.
- It was introduced in December 2018 to **manage agricultural stress**. Initially, the scheme was targeted at small and medium landed farmers, but with the declining growth in gross value added of the agricultural sector, it was extended to all farmers in May 2019.
- The scheme was started with a view to augment the income of the farmers by **providing income support to all landholding farmers' families** across the country, to enable them to take care of expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs.
- Under the Scheme an amount of Rs.6000/- per year is transferred in three 4-monthly instalments of Rs.2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary's rests with the State / UT Governments.
- The Union budget had allocated Rs 75,000 crore to this scheme in 2020-21.

Garib Kalyan Package and on March 28 it was announced Rs 2,000 (out of Rs 6,000) would be **front-loaded to 8.7 crore farmers**.

- The problems with identification of beneficiaries **in the absence of proper land records are well-known**.
- Also, there's no particular reason why landless labourers or the urban poor should be denied an income support scheme. The scheme is no long-term solution — all it does is make life a little less difficult for many.

Two aspects of this scheme present particular challenges:

- First, PM-KISAN is **not reaching all farmer households** as intended. Most of the farmers in UP, Haryana and Rajasthan own land and should be receiving benefits.
- But **only 21 per cent of the cultivators** interviewed reported receiving the benefit. The exclusion is greater in UP than in Haryana and Rajasthan.
- Second, this scheme is **not pro-poor** since recipients of PM-KISAN seemed to be **better off than the general rural population** even before the lockdown.
- Given this uncertainty over the reach of PM-KISAN and its targeting, the relevance of the scheme needs to be carefully evaluated during this period.

PM-KISAN during Lockdown period:

- PM-KISAN is a useful vehicle to provide support to farmers during the lockdown and it was included in the Pradhan Mantri

PM-KISAN is not reaching all farmer households:

1. In a survey, the proportion of households that had to borrow to meet their day-to-day consumption needs during the lockdown was relatively low for the farmers (34 per cent) compared to casual wage workers and business households.
2. While 7 per cent of farm households suffered from occasional unavailability of food during the lockdown, this figure was much higher for casual workers (24 per cent) and business households (14 per cent).
3. On the whole, when compared to **non-recipients of PM-KISAN** (including both farm and non-farm households), these households exhibited lower signs of economic distress.
4. **About 35 per cent of rural PM-KISAN recipients** suffered income losses to a large extent in comparison to more than half of the non-recipients.
5. A little more than a third of PM-KISAN recipients borrowed money during this period as against 48 per cent of non-recipients.
6. However, these households were somewhat better off than the general rural population even before receiving PM-KISAN benefits.
7. Thus, their relative immunity to the income shock may not be solely due to PM-KISAN.
8. Due to the **volatile market and price fluctuations** in different regions, it is important to index the cash transfers to local inflation.
9. Also, the failure of Direct Benefit Transfer in kerosene in Rajasthan is a case in point, where the cash transferred to families has been insufficient to purchase kerosene, as the market price increased substantially.
10. The scheme does not provide a clear design of transfers and a framework for effective grievance redress.

Other Important Income Support Schemes for Farmers:

Rythu Bandhu scheme (Telangana)/Farmers' Investment Support Scheme (FISS):

1. It is a welfare program to support farmer's investment for two crops a year.
2. The government is providing 58.33 lakh farmers, Rs.4000 per acre per season to support the farm investment, twice a year, for rabi and kharif seasons.
3. This was the first direct farmer investment support scheme in India, where the cash is paid directly.

Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA):

1. State Government of Odisha aims to lend farmers with an **all-inclusive and flexible support system**, ensuring accelerated agricultural prosperity.
2. It will cover **92% of the small and marginal farmers** of the State. An amount of Rs.10,000 per family at the rate of Rs.5,000 for Kharif and Rabi shall be provided as financial assistance for taking up cultivation.
3. The farmers will have complete independence to take up interventions as per their needs.
4. This component is not linked to extent of land owned and will greatly benefit share croppers and actual cultivators most of whom own very small extent of land.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The impact of a welfare measure such as PM-KISAN can only be realised through financial support that provides farmers with **adequate purchasing power to meet their daily basic necessities**.
- ❖ Therefore, to be effective, any cash transfer scheme should first ensure that there is enough cash provided to help bring an affected community out of poverty.
- ❖ A direct transfer scheme like PM-KISAN is a game-changer and can have significant effects if it is timely, not transaction cost heavy and is provided with **complementary inputs** such as extension services.

7. More evidence of India's food insecurity

A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease



Context:

- Data from the **latest edition** of the **State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)** report show that India retains the dubious distinction of being the country with the largest population of food insecure people.
- Estimates presented in the report which was released by several United Nations organisations show that the prevalence of food insecurity increased by 3.8 percentage points in India between 2014 and 2019.
- By 2019, 6.2 crore more people were living with food insecurity than the number in 2014.

State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report:

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World is an annual flagship report jointly prepared by:

1. Food and Agriculture Organization.
2. International Fund for Agricultural Development.

3. United Nations Children's Fund.
4. World Food Programme.
5. World Health Organization.

Objective of the report is to inform on **progress towards ending hunger**, achieving food security and improving nutrition and to provide in depth analysis on key challenges for achieving this goal in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Authoritative indicators: Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI):

1. The **SOFI report**, which is published annually, presents the most authoritative evaluation of hunger and food insecurity in the world.
2. Since 2017, SOFI presents **two key measures of food insecurity**:
3. the conventional measure called the **Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU)** and a new measure called the **Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI)**.
4. Both of these are globally-accepted indicators of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (**SDG**)

Target 2.1 to end hunger and food insecurity.

Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU):

- PoU is focused on estimating the proportion of population facing chronic deficiency of calories, the PMSFI is a more comprehensive measure of the lack of access to adequate and nutritious food.
- Estimates of PoU are based on food balance sheets and national surveys of consumption.
- Given that consumption surveys are done infrequently in most countries, these estimates are often based on outdated data and are revised when better data become available.

Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI):

- The PMSFI is based on annual surveys that collect information on experiences of **food insecurity** (such as food shortages, skipping meals, and changing diet diversity because of a lack of resources).
- Given the solid conceptual foundations of this methodology and the ease of collection of data, FIES and the PMFSI have been widely adopted by countries across the world.
- Although FAO-GWP surveys are conducted in India, India is among the few countries that do not allow publication of estimates based on these surveys. Consequently, as in the past years, estimates of PMSFI for India are not published in SOFI.

India as a global burden of Food Insecurity:

However, interestingly, these estimates can be derived for India from the information provided in the report.

1. These estimates show that while 8% of India's population suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity in 2014-16, the proportion rose to **31.6% in 2017-19**.

2. The number of food insecure people grew from 42.65 crore in 2014-16 to 48.86 crore in 2017-19.
3. **India accounted for 22% of the global burden of food insecurity**, the highest for any country, in 2017-19.
4. It is also noteworthy that while the PMSFI increased in India by 3.7 percentage points during this period, it fell by 0.5 percentage points in the rest of South Asia.
5. India has not released the latest **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) consumption expenditure survey data** for 2017-18.
6. As a result, conventional measures of poverty and food consumption are not available for recent years.
7. Lack of availability of data from this consumption survey also has implications for the FAO's PoU estimates for India.
8. Because of a lack of regular availability of consumption survey data from most countries, the FAO uses **supply-wise data on per capita food availability** to measure changes in average per capita calorie intake.

Causes of suffering of Food Insecurity:

- The significant rise in food insecurity, as shown by these data, is a clear manifestation of the overall economic distress during this period marked by a deepening agrarian crisis, falling investments across sectors and shrinking employment opportunities.
- The latest PLFS data have shown that the unemployment rates in the recent years have been higher than in the last four decades.
- It is widely believed that demonetisation and introduction of the Goods and Services Tax were two prime causes of economic distress during this period.

Conclusion:

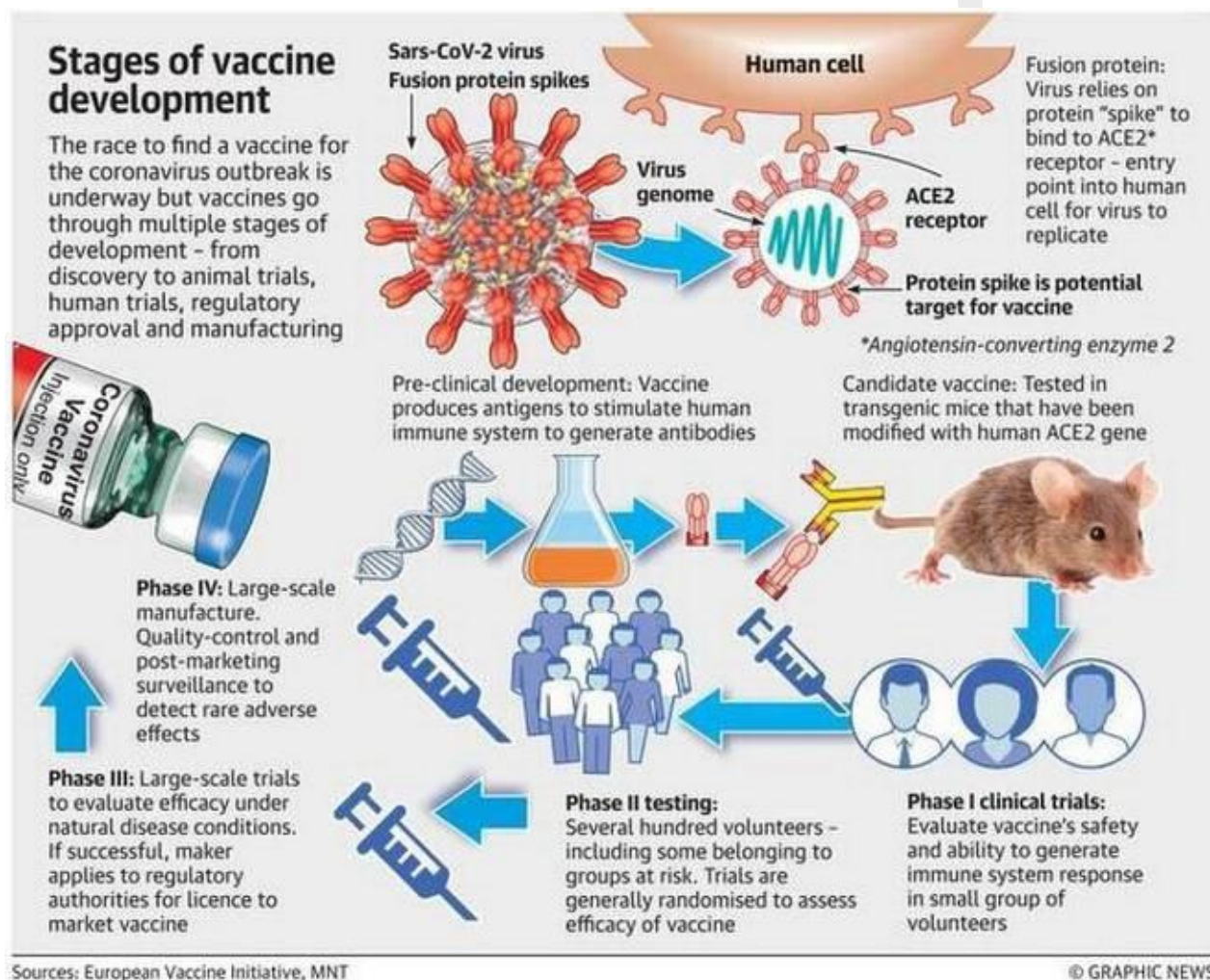
- ❖ A sudden imposition of an unprecedented and prolonged lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed focus on the **problems of hunger and food insecurity**.

- ❖ With a sudden loss of livelihoods, a vast majority of India's poor are faced with **increased food insecurity, hunger and starvation**. A number of starvation deaths have also been reported in the media.
- ❖ Given this, these estimates of the PMSFI provide an important baseline estimate for

the situation before the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ❖ It is critical for India to **conduct a national survey on food insecurity** to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on **food security** of different sections of the population.

8. More than a vaccine, it is about vaccination



Context:

- According to the **World Health Organization**, over 40 different candidate vaccines for COVID-19 are in development. These include an inactivated vaccine being developed in China (Sinovac) using purified COVID-19 virus killed with formaldehyde (a chemical).

- There are multiple other vaccine candidates under development that use DNA, RNA, viral vector and subunit protein platforms.
- During a pandemic, expecting vaccines the same year or the next, illustrates the power of technology, human hope, media hype — all at unprecedented frenzy.

How long does it take to develop a vaccine?

- It can take **years to develop vaccines** first in laboratories to show proof-of-concept,



then developing a manufacturing process to make stable and a highly pure product to be tested in animals and humans, and finally for the market.

- The COVID-19 vaccine has been fast-tracked into humans without prior testing in animals.

WHO chief scientist warns against 'vaccine nationalism':

- Chief Scientist at the World Health Organisation (WHO) raised the need to have a **multilateral or global approach to vaccine deployment and distribution**, rather than a more nationalistic approach.
- The argument they are making is that the **virus is everywhere in the world** and it would be impossible for the world to go back to normal, and for the economy to recover if only pockets of people are protected.
- Today, **10% of all infections have occurred in healthcare workers**. It would be unfair not to protect them before everyone else gets a chance.
- This was an ongoing dialogue happening globally, and getting a consensus was a challenge.
- There are a large number of vaccine candidates in development. Some of them are big companies; multinationals have the resources and expertise to run their own trials, while smaller companies may not get the same opportunities. We want to provide a platform for vaccines to be tested

India will have to deliver vaccine on a scale never seen before: Where India stands in vaccine delivery?

- Globally, **innumerable vaccine trials are progressing**; in India, two candidates have advanced considerably.
- An inactivated coronavirus vaccine was created by Hyderabad's Bharat Biotech. It is safe and immunogenic (stimulates anti-coronavirus antibody) in laboratory animals and humans, to be re-confirmed in a phase 2 trial; phase 3 will assess the vaccine's

safety and protective efficacy against COVID-19.

- Pune's Serum Institute of India (SII) is testing Oxford University-AstraZeneca's vaccine using a Trojan horse approach, spiking chimpanzee adenovirus type 5 with coronavirus spike glycoprotein genes.
- When injected, adenoviruses are detected and devoured by immune system cells patrolling for invading microbes. The smuggled genes force these cells to synthesise and spew out spike protein that is immunogenic.
- This adenovirus is harmless in humans. The SII is ready to upscale production after regulatory clearances in the United Kingdom and India.

Vaccine nationalism is 'measles of the world':

- Some **wealthy nations** made **bilateral financial agreements** with manufacturers in order to hog vaccines.
- Such vaccine nationalism is 'measles of the world', borrowing the phrase from Einstein.
- Global public good should not be hijacked by wealthy nations. Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, created COVAX — a funding facility to ensure up-scaling vaccine production and its access to low income countries as soon as regulatory approvals emerge.
- COVAX will support the SII with funds to bring down selling-price to \$3 per dose.

With good news on supply side, what about the delivery side?

- India's **Universal Immunisation Programme** is a vaccine-delivery platform for children and pregnant women, funded by the central government but implemented by State governments.
- However, the COVID-19 vaccine is for all age groups, necessitating an innovative platform, prioritised on the basis of need.

For India: Define policy for vaccine delivery should be in clarity:

1. The first step is policy definition leading to a plan of action blueprint. The time to create them is now it costs nothing, but will save time when a vaccine becomes available.
2. Policy emerges from objective(s) for vaccine use in individuals and community.
3. Priority for individual need is to protect those at high risk of death (senior citizens and those with medical co-morbidities) and front-line workers who expose themselves to infection while providing health care.
4. Children may be vaccinated before schools reopen to protect them and prevent infection from being carried home.
5. Vaccine availability will be limited at first, when we must ensure that those on the priority list receive it.
6. Information should be made available to the individual and the health management system, for which computerised data are critical.
7. A **nationwide database with unique identification** details already exists, a valuable resource to identify those who need not be vaccinated.
8. Identifying past asymptomatic infections requires **systematic screening for IgG antibody**.
9. Antibody positives need not be vaccinated (no harm if vaccinated). All data should be saved permanently.
10. Area-wise estimates of the numbers who need vaccination on a priority basis are necessary. Now is the time for State governments to capture all such data.

Getting a plan ready:

We **need a vaccine-delivery platform** to fulfil all such needs.

1. A practical method is **vaccination camps**, supervised by a medical officer, staffed by health management and **local government**, and having the list of people who need vaccination.

2. Information should be **updated regularly**, deleting those who got infected recently.
3. Enumeration and registration of eligible persons can be started now. Vaccination by appointments will ensure that vaccination is without overcrowding and with minimum waiting time.
4. Post-injection, vaccinated subjects should wait for half-an-hour in case of immediate side effects; emergency drugs to tackle side effects should be readily available.
5. In India, **careful documentation of all side effects** in all individuals, senior citizens, those with co-morbidities, and children must supplement trial data on vaccine safety.
6. This '**post-marketing surveillance**' must be built into the vaccine roll-out.

A community's need for vaccination is two-fold:

- All those who must **rebuild essential activities**, i.e. economic, educational, trade, transport, sociocultural and religious, must be protected.
- A more ambitious aim is **to break the novel coronavirus transmission and eradicate the disease altogether**.
- With India's notable representation in decision-making bodies of the World Health Organization, India is uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in advocating global eradication of COVID-19.

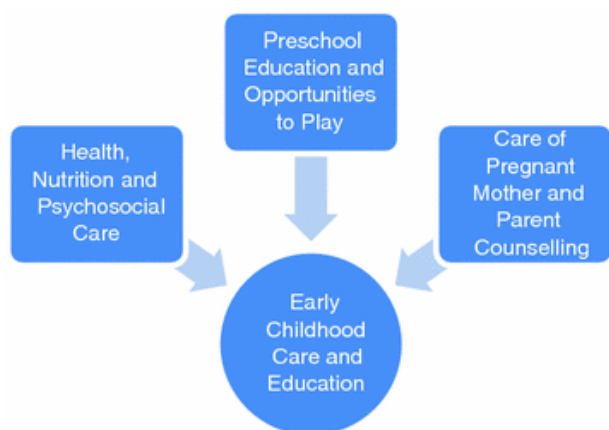
Conclusion:

- ❖ India would play a major role in **manufacturing and scaling of vaccines** apart from the research and development that was happening.
- ❖ The **vaccine regulatory agency** should take a call on the special question of vaccine safety during pregnancy.
- ❖ One vaccine is an inactivated virus and the second is a live virus but non-infectious. Both may be assumed to be safe; yet safety in pregnancy must be ascertained in bridge studies that must be conducted as soon as possible.

9. National well-being and the counts that matter

Introduction:

- Since **India's crimes data recording system** is not built to capture subtleties, we do not know what proportion of pregnancies in India start off without the consent of the woman, even though the veil of marriage may **cover it legally and culturally**.
- While **physical and mental violence** can be ascertained by a sensitive clinician, the **intergenerational impact** of a regretful and anxiety-loaded pregnancy is inadequately quantified by current clinical or epidemiological tools.
- Measuring and tracking matters of import is critical to individual, community as well as national well-being.



Parameters that are valuable in child birth:

What is valuable is measured frequently, at different life stages, and at disaggregated levels:

1. Birthweights; the heights and weights of our children when they enter school; school completion rates;
2. Perhaps the age, height and weight of a first-time pregnant woman; and most definitely, the number of women in the formal workforce who are on a par with men in terms of earning.

Underage marriage of girls must become history. **Ensuring secondary school completion of every child**, especially girls in rural areas, has far-

reaching impact, and needs to be **pursued single-mindedly**.

Provisioning separate, functional toilets and sanitary pads for girls, and teaching boys biology and gender differences (of their own and female) are key enablers to ensuring gender parity in school completion rates.

Teaching school-leaving girls and boys the notion of consent, and also the **basics of contraception**, will ensure that the start of every pregnancy will be a desired and happy one.

Desired Births in the country:

1. A desired pregnancy is to be supported by a **fully functional health-care system**, able to anticipate complications before time and facilitating a safe delivery.
2. Despite the trend towards nuclear families, pregnancies in India still are familial events outcomes are eagerly anticipated by more than just the parents, and stillbirths are a rude end to many fond wishes.
3. A young, short and under-schooled woman is more likely to have a **bad pregnancy outcome**, or, a smaller than expected baby.
4. A **birth weight** is much more than a number it is a **complex outcome**, telling of how well the woman and her family eats, her status among them, and also of any particular condition that the individual mother or new-born child has.
5. Tracking average birthweights by district and subdistrict on a regular basis is a fair proxy for food security, the status of women and the delivery of primary health care.
6. For a nation with **plans to assign digital health IDs to everyone**, this is not a tall ask — what is additionally required is the making of this **moving average data live and visible to the people and their government**.
7. It should also put to rest all debate about whether some Indians are born more equal than others.

Height-weight proportions in growth and development of a child:

1. A good start is a great advantage, but easily squandered if **subsequent growth and development** are blighted by the **lack of adequate nutrition**, first exclusively from the mother's breast, then through **locally available weaning** and complementary foods; and repeated bouts of **vaccine preventable** or easily treatable illnesses.
2. Parental hopes of a child growing up, going to school and becoming successful hit a major hurdle if the height-weight proportions at age five are not normal.
3. Ensuring this marker is recorded for every child who enters school will also allow for a correlation with birthweights at the district level giving a better understanding of multi-dimensional property.
4. If India is to be **truly taking advantage** of its **large birth cohort** in the form of a **demographic dividend**, then the correlate of birthweight and five-year height-weight needs to be reviewed at the highest political levels regularly.
5. It reflects the physical and cognitive nurture of human capital that the country can bank on for its future.
6. Every child born in India is to be considered a ratna – a jewel and handled as such; some of them will go on to get the formal Bharat Ratna tag eventually.

Improved learning abilities:

- **Schooling** is a socio-economic and gender parity springboard if school completion rates show no gender, rural-urban or parental income divides.
- Consequently, India may not only **bring down its maternal mortality ratios** but also **improve neonatal and under five mortality rates**, through delayed marriages and exercising of reproductive choices by its empowered young women.

New education policy will be a best remedy if implement in letter and spirit:

1. With better cognitive capacities and supportive environment, the stress of learning reduces, and outcomes improve.
2. **Improved learning** should translate into better completion rates at post-secondary and bacculaureate levels but need not necessarily correspond to universal, meaningful employment.
3. It is for the government and the corporate world to make opportunities and workplaces happen, irrespective of their gender.
4. Right economic stimuli, anticipating potential workplace disruptions, supporting reskilling and retraining, and decriminalising entrepreneurial failure will go a long way in eliminating work and livelihood-related anxieties making their way back home as domestic violence.
5. Unimaginative teaching of anaemic children is a double whammy, partially addressed through protein rich mid-day meals.
6. Deworming, school toilets, sanitary pads and bicycles for girls are progressive policy steps in the right direction; adding remedial training and affirmative feedback for teachers will be transformative.
7. As a society, we need to understand and make leeway for failure, and not stigmatise it, whether at school in early childhood, during miscarriages of pregnancies, or when career and business decisions go awry.

Conclusion: Timely data helps:

- ❖ Together, these measurements will tell us far more about where we are, and where we as a nation will go.
- ❖ The tools to get these measurements exist; we just have to see them in real time to be able to take corrective actions where needed.
- ❖ Public health is about people, their **continued well-being**, and not just about controlling disease outbreaks.
- ❖ **Data helps; timely, disaggregated, multidimensional data** helps immensely in

ensuring collective well-being, physical, mental and social.

- ❖ People are India's greatest possession and will remain so for the conceivable future, provided they are in a state of well-being.

- ❖ An ill-educated, anxious population is a tinderbox, capable of self-harm as well as being kindling for malice-driven mobilisation.

- ❖ Addressing this requires a **whole of life and whole of society approach**, and measuring the outcomes that matter, regularly.

RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS

GENERAL STUDIES I

1. Bridging Gender Gap

Introduction:

Every year on **March 8**, the world observes **International Women's Day**. The purpose is to reflect on the progress made by women in different fields, to celebrate the acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in history and to call for action to bring about the necessary change towards gender equality. According to the **Global Gender Gap Report**, it will take more than 200 years for economic gender equality to emerge, and 108 years to completely close the global gender gap across politics, health and education.

Global gender gap report:

- It is published annually by the world economic forum since 2006. Global gender gap index is a part of this which measures gender equality across **four pillars**— they are **economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and survival**.

Performance of various countries:

1. Iceland has been ranked as Number 1. It is followed by Norway, Sweden and Finland.
2. Other countries in top 10 include Nicaragua, Rwanda, New Zealand, Philippines, Ireland and Namibia.
3. As per the report, at the current speed it will take about 108 years to close the overall gender gap in the world. And after 202 years there will be parity in the workplace in the world at the current rate of change.
4. Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and finally Yemen showed the biggest overall gender gaps of the countries surveyed.

Performance of India:

1. India has been ranked at 108.

2. It has recorded improvement in wage equality for similar work and has fully closed its tertiary education gender gap for the first time.
3. It ranks 142nd out of 149 countries in the economic opportunity and participation subindex.
4. India continues to rank third-lowest in the world on health and survival, remaining the world's least-improved country on this subindex over the past decade.
5. India has slightly improved in WEF's wage equality for similar work indicator, where it stood at 72nd place. The country has also closed its tertiary education enrolment gap for the first time in 2018 and has managed to keep its primary and secondary gaps closed for the third year running.
6. Interestingly, India has the second-largest artificial intelligence (AI) workforce but one of the largest AI gender gaps, with only 22% of roles filled by women.

Why Gender Equality?

1. To enable women to participate fully in society and contribute to the health and prosperity of the society.
2. It is estimated that India can potentially boost its GDP by \$700 billion by 2025, by raising female labour-force participation rate.
3. Gender equality contributes to growth by raising the female-to-male ratio of labor-force participation, increasing women's work hours, and having more women working in higher productivity sectors.
4. Equality at work goes hand in hand with gender equality in society. • Economically empowered women boost demand, have healthier and better-educated children, and raise human development levels
5. Enabling her to lead a life of dignity.

6. Preventing their socio-economic exploitation and lowers domestic violence.
7. Enhancing a woman's control over household decision-making.
8. If we have representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's), in local bodies, in MLA and MP seats, evidence shows that the decision making by women is much better or superior than men.

Gender Inequality:

1. Women remain subject to traditional attitudes that define their primary role as being in the home.
2. Women often lack access to the financing needed to start or expand a business.
3. Globally, the value of women's unpaid work performed is three times higher than that of men, whereas in the Asia-Pacific region, it is four times higher.
4. Unconscious bias in the workplace.
5. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in
6. More than 50 percent of women have no valuable assets to their name.
7. India has a lower share of women's contribution to the GDP than the global average.
8. Women face great physical insecurity.
9. Crimes against women such as rapes, dowry deaths, and honour killings.
10. A culturally ingrained parental preference for sons — emanating from their importance as caregivers for parents in old age.

Challenges:

1. Stereotypical thinking and **Patriarchal mindset is the biggest challenge.**
2. Declining child sex ratio (CSR), the practice of gender-biased sex selection, and child marriage.
3. Domestic violence against women is also high.
4. Women being exposed to violence by their partners.

5. Judicial remedies or police reforms, though absolutely necessary, are mostly curative, rather than being preventive.
6. Benefits like maternity leave or related facilities will not be accessible to her in the informal sector.

Potential Areas of Focus:

1. From a corporate perspective, every organization is promoting a healthy ratio of women in their workforce. When we look at statistics three years before, it used to be 18-22% even in the formal sector.
2. This has gone up to a figure of 30-32% currently. Secondly, this larger workforce is coming at the entry level.
3. The private sector and business community will be crucial in helping bridge the gap between skills and jobs and enable access to decent work for women.
4. Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities.
5. Companies can also invest in women entrepreneurs through microfinance, and bring their goods and services into supply chains.
6. Enhancing women's access to the internet and ICT can create a market of connected women who can be linked to business opportunities.
7. Increasing representation of women in the public spheres is important.
8. Female leaders serve as role models and raise educational and career aspirations for adolescent girls and their parents.
9. Attitudinal shift is essential for women to be considered as equal within their homes and in broader society.
10. Educating Indian children from an early age about the importance of gender equality.

Way Forward:

- ✓ A **self-drive from the entire workforce.**
- ✓ Encouragement from the family, society and the corporations with whom they are employed with.

- ✓ The best way to bridge the gender gap would be in **terms of education**.
- ✓ There is much scope in the area of secondary and tertiary education, but more so in the field of technical education.
- ✓ Until we see this as a **mindset issue**, i.e. we change the patriarchal mindset and our myths and misconceptions around the preference for son's, etc. we would probably be discussing all these issues in an economic perspective.
- ✓ Need ownership of the idea that women's employment is something that you want to achieve as a goal and not by chasing statistics.
- ✓ **Government Initiatives** are required
- ✓ Companies should also now start seeing women's issues.
- ✓ Women should not be quitting midway in their careers.

Link: <https://youtu.be/tk5HS6xo-pg>

2. National Water Policy

Introduction:

Government plans to come out with an updated version of National Water Policy with key changes in governance structures and regulatory framework. Plans are also to set up a **National Bureau of Water Use Efficiency**. Building consensus among the states within the constitutional framework is the pre-condition for making this changes. National Water policy was formulated to govern the planning and development of water resources and their optimum utilization. The first National Water Policy was adopted in 1987, it was reviewed and updated in 2002 and later in 2012.

National Water Policy 2012:

The salient features of national water policy (2012) are as follows:

1. Emphasis on the need for a **national water framework law**, comprehensive legislation for optimum development of inter-State rivers and river valleys.
2. Water, after meeting the pre-emptive needs for safe drinking water and sanitation, achieving food security, supporting poor people dependent on agriculture for their livelihood and high priority allocation for minimum eco-system needs, be treated as **economic good** so as to promote its conservation and efficient use.
3. Ecological needs of the river should be determined recognizing that river flows are characterized by low or no flows, small floods (freshets), large floods and flow variability and should accommodate development needs. A portion of river flows should be kept aside to meet ecological needs ensuring that the proportional low and high flow releases correspond in time closely to the natural flow regime.
4. Adaptation strategies in view of climate change for **designing and management of water resources structures and review of acceptability criteria** has been emphasized.
5. A system to evolve **benchmarks for water uses for different purposes**, i.e., water footprints, and water auditing be developed to ensure efficient use of water. Project financing has been suggested as a tool to incentivize efficient & economic use of water.
6. Setting up of **Water Regulatory Authority** has been recommended.
7. **Incentivization of recycle and re-use** has been recommended.
8. **Water Users Associations should be given statutory powers** to collect and retain a portion of water charges, manage the volumetric quantum of water allotted to them and maintain the distribution system in their jurisdiction.
9. **Removal of large disparity** in stipulations for water supply in urban areas and in rural areas has been recommended.
10. Water resources projects and services should be managed with **community participation**. Wherever the State Governments or local governing bodies so decide, the private sector can be encouraged to become a service provider in

public private partnership model to meet agreed terms of service delivery, including penalties for failure.

11. Adequate **grants to the States** to update technology, design practices, planning and management practices, preparation of annual water balances and accounts for the site and basin, preparation of hydrologic balances for water systems, and benchmarking and performance evaluation etc.

Why is there a need of updated National Water Policy?

1. There are lots of changes that are required in the policy.
2. **Privatization of water usage** should be defined.
3. Agriculture was there **but not included in the policy parameters**.
4. River revitalization is required to be revised.
5. Technological innovation is required with the sensors, GIS and satellite imagery.
6. Need to **modulate the water** by having a good picture of its path and quantity.
7. Need to go back from basin to sub-basin to watershed and down into village water budgeting level.
8. Policy does not deter use among those who can afford to pay for water.
9. Policy does **not follow polluter pay principle**, rather it gives incentives for effluent treatment.
10. Policy is criticized for terming water as an economic good.
11. It does not focus on **water pollution**

India's water crisis:

1. **Delay in monsoon** and change in pattern.
2. **Management of both supply side and demand side of water.**
3. **Unprecedented heat waves, which** can become more **persistent with climate change**.
4. Less pre monsoon rain.
5. **Water levels in India's major reservoirs have fallen** to 21 per cent of the average of the last decade.

6. Fifty four per cent of the country's groundwater is declining faster than it is being replenished.
7. There is a crippling dependence on monsoon rains to replenish most of India's key water sources— underground aquifers, lakes, rivers and reservoirs.
8. Close to half the country, about 600 million people, face severe scarcity year after year.
9. A Niti Ayog report forecasts water demand will be twice the present supply and India could lose up to 6 per cent of its GDP.
10. India's water table is falling in most parts; there is fluoride, arsenic, mercury, even uranium in our groundwater.
11. The groundwater and sand extraction from most river beds and basins has turned unsustainable.
12. Tanks and ponds are encroached upon.
13. Dug-wells and borewells are constructed with alarming impunity to slide deeper and deeper to suck water from greater depths.
14. Water is being diverted from food-crops to cash-crops; livelihoods to lifestyles; rural to urban— **mismanagement is a bigger reason** for the drought.
15. Water shortages are **hurting India's ability to produce power** and 40% thermal power plants are in areas facing high water stress, a recent World Resources Institute report says.
16. Not only farmers, urban dwellers in cities and towns across India are also staring at a never seen before drinking water scarcity.

Getting States on Board:

1. Getting states on board will be a very important element.
2. In earlier water policies as well state water policies were fused into it.
3. **Entire federal structure will be tested with the issue of water.**
4. Process has to be dialogue driven, taking into sensitivity of the states as well and should not be imposed upon.

Way Forward:

- ✓ **Hydrological boundaries, rather than administrative or political boundaries,**



should be part of the water governance structure in the country.

- ✓ **Building consensus** among the States within the Constitutional framework is a pre-condition for making the changes.
- ✓ **Water conservation, along with water harvesting** and judicious and multiple use of water, are key to tackling the water challenges that India faces.
- ✓ **Rejuvenation and revitalisation of traditional water bodies** and resources through the age-old conservation methods.
- ✓ Need for disseminating **modern water technologies** in an extensive fashion.

- ✓ Relook **basin and sub-basin** planning
- ✓ Water policy should take in all recommendations and warning given by NITI Aayog
- ✓ Batting for policy changes for giving incentive to crops using less water.
- ✓ **Participatory groundwater management** should be promoted in a big way to maintain quality and sustainability.

Link: <https://youtu.be/61FJ9sUVyIM>

3. Avalanche

Introduction:

In the Kargil district, the Indian Army has another big adversary besides Pakistan. These are avalanches. Over 1,000 Indian soldiers, including over 35 officers, have lost their lives in the Siachen Glacier-Saltoro Ridge region since April 1984. Four soldiers died after being trapped in snow for hours after an avalanche hit Army positions in northern Siachen Glacier. Two porters also died. The soldiers were a part of a patrolling group of eight. At a height of around 20,000 ft in the Karakoram range. The **Siachen Glacier is known as the highest militarised zone in the world** where the soldiers have to battle frostbite and high winds. **Avalanches and landslides are common on the glacier during the winters and temperatures can drop to as low as minus 60 degree Celsius.**

1. **Avalanche**, a mass of material moving rapidly down a slope.
2. An avalanche is typically triggered when material on a slope breaks loose from its surroundings; this material then quickly collects and carries additional material down the slope.
3. There are various kinds of avalanches, including **rock avalanches** (which consist of large segments of shattered rock), **ice avalanches** (which typically occur in the vicinity of a glacier), and **debris avalanches** (which contain a variety of unconsolidated materials, such as loose stones and soil).

4. The size of a avalanche can range from a small shifting of loose snow to the displacement of enormous slabs of snow.
5. In a slab avalanche, the mass of descending snow may reach a speed of 130 km (80 miles) per hour and is capable of destroying forests and small villages in its path.
6. Avalanches kill about 150 people a year in North America and Europe. Most of those killed are backcountry skiers, climbers, snowshoers, and snowmobilers who accidentally trigger an avalanche and become buried in the snow.
7. Avalanches also have been triggered intentionally in warfare to kill enemy troops.
8. In World War I, during fighting in the Alps on the Austrian-Italian front in December 1916, more than 10,000 troops were killed in a single day by avalanches triggered by artillery fired onto slopes of unstable snow.

Features of avalanches:

1. Avalanches contain three main features: **the starting zone, the avalanche track, and the runout zone.** Avalanches launch from the starting zone. That's often the most unstable part of the slope, and generally higher on the mountain.
2. Once the avalanche starts to slide, it continues down the avalanche track, the natural path it follows downhill. After avalanches, large clearings or missing

chutes of trees provide clues to an avalanche's trajectory.

3. The avalanche finally comes to a stop at the bottom of a slope, in the runout zone, where the snow and debris pile up.

Factors responsible for the Avalanche:

1. Heavy Snowfall

- When a high rate of snowfall occurred leading to the snow accumulation on the mountain slopes triggered the weaker layer of snow in the snowpack of unstable areas of the mountain causes Avalanche.

2. Wind Direction

- The direction of the wind determines the patterns of the snowfall as well snow accumulation on the mountain slopes. If the strong wind blows, then the upward direction of the winds might trigger the steep slope which causes an avalanche.

3. Layering of Snow

- The gradual snowfall creates layer by layer accumulation of snow that hypersensitive the snowpack. If something catastrophic events happen then these layers of snow falls down that leads to avalanche.

4. Steeper Slopes

- An avalanche is also caused by the influence of gravity. If gradual snowfalls accumulated on the slopes of the mountain then it prone to rush downs the slopes at greater speeds.

5. Higher Temperatures

- Temperature is one of the important factors for the avalanche because of high temperature the surface layer of the snowpack gets melted. The accumulated snow will become highly susceptible to sliding down.

6. Earthquakes

- It is one of the important factors that triggered the layer of accumulated snowpack because earthquakes generate seismic waves that cause the ground to vibrate.

7. Movements or Vibrations Produced By Machines and Explosives

- As we know that the population increasing day by day, which requires development activities to meet the population requirement. During the developmental activities, the terrain vehicles in regions with unstable layers of snow can dislodge the layers from the surface and cause them to slide down under gravity.

8. Deforestation

- Deforestation, clearance, or clearing is the removal of a forest or stand of trees where the land is thereafter converted to a non-forest use. Trees and plants always protect land against natural disasters like floods, tidal waves, strong winds, and also avalanche. Hence, a developmental activity for economic gains makes the mountain region an avalanche-prone area more susceptible to deadlier avalanches.

9. Winter Sports Activities

- Above all the factors, this factor will act like the last nail to triggered steep slopes or loose snowpack by skiers or other winter sports activities.

Prediction and protective measures:

1. In order to reduce fatalities and to protect villages and roads, people attempt to predict and prevent avalanches.
2. **Accurate avalanche prediction** requires an experienced avalanche forecaster who often works both in the field to gather snowpack information and in the office with sophisticated tools such as remotely accessed weather data, detailed historical weather and avalanche databases, weather models, and avalanche-forecasting models.

3. Avalanche detention wall.
4. Avalanche forecasters combine their historical knowledge of past conditions with their knowledge of the affected terrain, current weather, and current snowpack conditions to predict when and where avalanches are most likely to occur.
5. Avalanche mitigation wall.
6. Such forecasting work typically takes place along mountain highways, adjacent to potentially affected villages, at ski areas, and in terrain heavily used for backcountry skiing and snowmobiling.
7. In addition to predicting avalanches, people employ a variety of techniques to reduce avalanche danger. Explosives are used to trigger avalanches on potentially unstable slopes so that the avalanches will occur when people are not endangered.
8. Such avalanche control is particularly effective for ski areas and highway corridors.
9. In some areas prone to avalanches, particularly near villages and fixed structures, devices such as avalanche rakes (large reinforced fencing) are used on slopes to hold snow in place, and diversion structures such as dams or wedges are used at the base of the slope to stop, split, or deflect the snow in an avalanche.
10. Though expensive, these defensive measures are common throughout the Alps, where numerous villages are found in areas known for dangerous avalanches.

Link: <https://youtu.be/uzDr6deemfk>

GENERAL STUDIES II

1. Pendency of Case & Virtual Courts

Introduction:

Mounting pendency of cases from the Supreme Court to the lower courts has Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu worried as he expressed concern on the issue. Naidu also urged the government and the judiciary to ensure faster justice. He was addressing the Platinum Jubilee meet of Dr B.R. Ambedkar College of Law, Andhra University on the occasion of its 76th Foundation Day. Naidu underscored the need to make delivery of justice speedier and affordable. Citing adjournment of cases over long periods, he observed that justice was becoming costly and referred to the well-known proverb "justice delayed is justice denied". In a significant statement, the Vice President remarked that Public Interest Litigations (PILs) should not become private interest litigations for personal, pecuniary and political interests.

Present Status:

1. Supreme Court continues to be plagued by pending cases inspite of the steps taken to address it.
2. 60,450 pending matters in the Supreme Court.
3. In the high courts, there are 45,12,800 pending cases of which 85% cases are pending since last 1 year.
4. Over 2,89,96000 cases, are pending in various subordinate courts of the country, latest official data shows of which 80% are pending since last one year.
5. The criminal cases are more compared to civil cases.

Reasons:

1. Inordinate delay in filling up the vacancies of judicial officers, around 6000 posts are lying empty in the subordinate courts. It leads to poor Judges to Population Ratio, as India has only **20 judges per million population**. Earlier, Law Commission had recommended 50 judges per million.
2. **Frequent adjournments:** The laid down procedure of allowing a maximum of three adjournments per case is not followed in over 50 per cent of the matters being heard by courts, leading to rising pendency of cases.

3. The Supreme Court's increased activity is being driven by appeals from lower courts.
4. The special leave petition (SLP) which the Constituent Assembly hoped would be used sparingly, but which now dwarfs the work of the Supreme Court.
5. Increasing number of state and central legislations.
6. In addition to judicial shortages, courts are underfunded.
7. Due to Government Litigation. According to the Ministry of Law and Justice, government departments are a party to around "46 percent" of court cases.
8. Supreme Court's works on average for 188 days a year, while apex court rules specify **minimum of 225 days of work**.
9. Courts have created dedicated posts for court managers to help improve court operations, optimise case movement and judicial time. However only few courts have filled up such posts so far.
10. Police are quite often handicapped in undertaking effective investigation for want of modern and scientific tools to collect evidences.
11. With people becoming more aware of their rights and the obligations of the State towards them, they approach the courts more frequently in case of any violation
4. **Affects the economy of the country** as it was estimated that judicial delays cost India around 1.5% of its Gross Domestic Product annually.
5. As per the Economic Survey 2017-18 pendency hampers dispute resolution, contract enforcement, discourage investments, stall projects, hamper tax collection and escalate legal costs which leads to Increasing cost of doing business.
6. Due to the backlog, most of India's prison population are detainees awaiting trial.
7. Courts in Mumbai are clogged with decade-old land disputes, hindering the city's industrial development.
8. The pursuit of justice has been made more expensive by chronic delays.
9. This exacerbates the discrimination already faced by India's minority and low-caste groups.
10. Corruption too, is endemic. People would rather bribe a police officer than go through the lengthy hassle of a trial.
11. The impunity that criminals may enjoy because of slow legal system.

Various efforts:

1. Over the time, the infrastructure has been improved.
2. In- service training and orientation programmes for judges to match and to make them aware of new laws and IT developments.
3. The e-Committee of the Supreme Court had launched the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) to provide data on cases pending in the district courts across the country.

Impacts of Judicial Pendency

1. **Denial of 'timely justice' amounts to denial of 'justice' itself as pointed out by Vice President:** Timely disposal of cases is essential to maintain rule of law and provide access to justice. Speedy trial is a part of right to life and liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.
2. **Erodes social infrastructure:** a weak judiciary has a negative effect on social development, which leads to: lower per capita income; higher poverty rates; poorer public infrastructure; and, higher crime rates.
3. **Affects human rights:** Overcrowding of the prisons, already infrastructure deficient, in some cases beyond 150% of the capacity, results in "violation of human rights".

Judiciary during Lockdown period:

1. As soon as the lockdown was announced, the SC under article 142 made it mandatory to frame guidelines for virtual courts.
2. The **judiciary continued its primary work of hearing matters** and, undertook the prodigious task of digitising the court system which included **virtual court hearings**.
3. Virtual courts had mixed response and lawyers have resisted it because of its

technical problems but we need to work on it

4. The **judiciary, very quickly organised itself to continue to hear urgent matters** through video conferencing.
5. **Urgent e-filing protocols** were swiftly drafted and implemented. Despite the initial glitches, to the judiciary's credit, the **system improved and evolved**, quite literally with each passing day.
6. **Practice directions and guidelines** were drafted, amended and uploaded, the process of bringing trial courts into the fray was initiated, the number and types of matters to be heard began to be identified on the **basis of urgency** and expanded these, though impressive on their own, are but a few of the many unprecedented measures undertaken in a short period of time.

Concerns:

1. India has 19 judges per 10 lakh people on an average, according to a Law Ministry data which also states that the judiciary faces a shortage of over 7,000 judges, including over 6,000 in the lower courts itself.
2. According to Markandey Katju, a retired Supreme Court justice, judges should have no more than 300 cases pending at any one time, but backlogs for individual judges stretch into the tens of thousands.
3. Because of large caseload of ordinary cases, the Supreme Court is finding it difficult to schedule important constitutional cases that require larger benches

Way Forward:

- ✓ The chief justices of the high courts must fast-track cases that are pending for more than 10 years.
- ✓ Increasing the number of judges or creating additional benches.
- ✓ Chief justices of the high courts must speed up recruitment of judicial officers for the lower judiciary.
- ✓ A long-term goal to Keep courts open 365 days a year.

- ✓ A committee of retired judges should be appointed to find out the problems that lead to the stalling of cases, their remedies and implement them.
- ✓ Supreme Court can have special benches across India so that the poorer citizens can have greater access.
- ✓ Our courts should be fully digitised and technical experts should be brought in to streamline the whole process right from when a person files a case, to updating it, to the final verdict.
- ✓ We have to do a major overhaul of "de-Britishising" of the system i.e. overhaul of archaic laws.
- ✓ Having four to five clerks for each judge to help filter out appeals, write memos, and draft decisions, which is the norm in countries such as South Africa or the United States, could greatly reduce the judges' workload.
- ✓ Brazil disposes of about 100,000 cases each year with far fewer judges. To take on such a large load, clerks and other staff take a central role in drafting decisions for the many routine matters.
- ✓ Judicial process needs to be streamlined. Lawyers need to be penalised for delaying matters without reason.
- ✓ A multi-pronged approach needs to be adopted to tackle the issue of "government litigation".
- ✓ The focus is on **how to make the virtual courts user friendly**. Once it is achieved, more cases in addition to urgent matters can be listed for adjudication.
- ✓ So, it is prudent that more virtual courts are set up so that timely delivery justice is not adversely impacted on account of the pandemic.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Addressing the backlog is necessary to maintain India's "constitutional democracy," to adhere to "the rule of law" and to "guarantee order and stability in society".
- ❖ The country's progress depends on a strong judicial system which can provide quick

justice because justice delayed is justice denied.

Link: https://youtu.be/5FEec_ZlqZ8

2. Role & Functions of National Recruitment Agency

Terming the setting up of a National Recruitment Agency as “historic”, Union minister Jitendra Singh said it will conduct an online Common Eligibility Test for shortlisting candidates for majority of central government jobs twice a year. He said the multiple recruitment examinations are a burden on the candidates, as also on the respective recruitment agencies, involving avoidable or repetitive expenditure, law and order or security-related issues and venue-related problems. It is envisioned that the **NRA would be a specialist body** bringing state of the art technology and best practices to the field of central government recruitment.

A major boon for the youth:

1. At present, candidates seeking government jobs have to appear for separate examinations conducted by multiple recruiting agencies for various posts, for which similar eligibility conditions have been prescribed.
2. Candidates have to pay fee to multiple recruiting agencies and also have to travel long distances for appearing in various exams. These multiple recruitment examinations are a burden on the candidates, as also on the respective recruitment agencies, involving avoidable/repetitive expenditure, law and order/security related issues and venue related problems.
3. On an average, 2.5 crore to 3 crore candidates appear in each of these examinations. A common eligibility Test would enable these candidates to appear once and apply to any or all of these recruitment agencies for the higher level of examination. This would indeed be a boon to all the candidates.

National Recruitment Agency (NRA)

1. The setting up of such an agency to conduct a common eligibility test (CET) was

announced in the Union Budget by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in February.

2. A multi-agency body called the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) will conduct a Common Eligibility Test (CET) to screen/shortlist candidates for the Group B and C (non-technical) posts.
3. NRA will have representatives of Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance/Department of Financial Services, the SSC, RRB & IBPS. It is envisioned that the NRA would be a specialist body bringing the state-of-the-art technology and best practices to the field of Central Government recruitment.

Salient features:

1. The Common Eligibility Test will be held **twice a year**.
2. There will be different CETs for graduate level, 12th Pass level and 10th pass level to facilitate recruitment to vacancies at various levels.
3. The CET will be conducted in **12 major Indian languages**. This is a major change, as hitherto examinations for recruitment to Central Government jobs were held only in English and Hindi.
4. To begin with CET will cover recruitments made by three agencies : viz. Staff Selection Commission, Railway Recruitment Board and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection. This will be expanded in a phased manner.
5. CET will be held in 1,000 centres across India in a to bid remove the currently prevalent urban bias. There will be an examination centre in every district of the country. There will be a special thrust on creating examination infrastructure in the 117 aspirational districts.
6. CET will be a first level test to shortlist candidates and the score will be **valid for three years**.

7. There shall be no restriction on the number of attempts to be taken by a candidate to appear in the CET subject to the upper age limit. Age relaxation for SC/ST and OBC candidates as per existing rules will apply.
8. NRA shall conduct a separate CET each for the three levels of graduate, higher secondary (12th pass) and the matriculate (10th pass) candidates for those non-technical posts to which recruitment is presently carried out by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) and by the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS). Based on the screening done at the CET score level, final selection for recruitment shall be made through separate specialised Tiers (II, III etc) of examination which shall be conducted by the respective recruitment agencies. The curriculum for this test would be common as would be the standard. This would greatly ease the burden of candidates who are at present required to prepare for each of the examinations separately as per different curriculum.
9. NRA shall conduct a separate CET each for the three levels of graduate, higher secondary (12th pass) and the matriculate (10th pass) candidates for those non-technical posts to which recruitment is presently carried out by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), the Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs) and by the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS). Based on the screening done at the CET score level, final selection for recruitment shall be made through separate specialised Tiers (II, III etc) of examination which shall be conducted by the respective recruitment agencies. The curriculum for this test would be common as would be the standard. This would greatly ease the burden of candidates who are at present required to prepare for each of the examinations separately as per different curriculum.

Women candidates to benefit greatly:

- Women candidates especially from rural areas face constraints in appearing in multiple examinations as they have to arrange for transportation and places to stay in places that are far away.
- They sometimes have to find suitable persons to accompany them to these Centres that are located far away. The location of test centres in every District would greatly benefit candidates from rural areas in general and women candidates in particular.

Advantages for students:

1. Removes the hassle of appearing in multiple examinations.
2. Single examination fee would reduce financial burden that multiple exams imposed.
3. Since exams will be held in every district, it would substantially save travel and lodging cost for the candidates. Examination in their own district would encourage more and more women candidates also to apply for government jobs.
4. Applicants are required to register on a single Registration portal.
5. No need to worry about clashing of examination dates.

Advantages for Institutions:

1. Removes the hassle of conducting preliminary / screening test of candidates.
2. Drastically reduces the recruitment cycle.
3. Brings standardization in examination pattern.
4. Reduces costs for different recruiting agencies. Rs 600 crore savings expected.

Link: <https://youtu.be/KfDzlTnpqco>

3. NEP 2020- Languages Culture & Values

Introduction:

The Union Cabinet recently approved the new National Education Policy 2020 to bring “large-scale transformational reforms” in both school and higher education. The new education policy for the country comes after almost 34 years. It stipulates for a complete overhaul of the existing education system. Among the key highlights of NEP 2020 is the decision to make home language, mother tongue or regional language as the medium of instruction up to class 5. Experts believe this may create a long-term impact in nation building. Imparting school education in mother tongue or regional language may bring drastic change in the ongoing process of human resource development. Analysts believe regional languages help inculcate human values and emotions and learning mother tongue will also help future generations forge a relation with their own social and cultural fabric.

Key Points:

1. Early schooling in a child’s mother tongue, as recommended in the new National Education Policy, can improve learning, increase student participation and reduce the number of dropouts, of evidence from around the world shows that
2. However, this would need new books, fresh teacher training and more funding, experts said. Also, given the multiplicity of languages and dialects in India, it is difficult to home in on the one that can be used as the medium of instruction in an area.
3. The National Education Policy (NEP) says that wherever possible the medium of instruction in schools until Grade V, preferably until Grade VIII, should be the mother tongue or the local or regional language. “All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged”.
4. Using the language the child is most comfortable with in the early school years improves attendance and learning outcomes, and the ability to learn new languages. Studies from around the world also show that it increases classroom participation, reduces the number of dropouts and grade repetition.
5. It also offers them an opportunity to get introduced to social and cultural identities
6. Still, half of all children in low and middle-income countries are not taught in a language they speak, estimated a 2016 report from the Education Commission, a global initiative for inclusive and quality education.
7. Parents prefer to send their children to ‘English-medium’ schools regardless of the quality of education they offer because of the perception that mastery of the English language ensures success in later life. For example, in 2017-18, about 14% of those who were enrolled in private schools in India’s rural areas and 19.3% in urban areas chose a private school because English was the medium of instruction.
8. Experts argue that an English education is not always the best. One can learn to read and write best in the language that you know.
9. Good learning happens when children have high self-esteem, are well-adjusted in a classroom that provides a positive and fearless environment. If the child is taught in a language they do not understand, none of this will happen.
10. In 2019, in rural India, only 16.2% of children enrolled in Grade I could read a Grade I-level text, while only 39.5% could add one-digit numbers orally, ASER put together by Pratham.
11. The 2011 Census listed 270 mother tongues; of these, as per a 2017 study, 47 languages were used as mediums of instruction in Indian classrooms.
12. But teaching in the mother tongue is not a silver bullet to solve the problem of low learning outcomes.
13. The NEP does not detail a plan to change the medium of instruction. For multilingual education (MLE) to be successful, it has to be accompanied by pedagogical changes and trained teachers who can deal with several languages in the classroom and teach in the child’s mother tongue.

Old idea but little implementation:

1. The idea of using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary school is not new to the Indian education system.
2. Article 350A of the Constitution states that every state and local authority should endeavour to provide “adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups”.
3. The report of the Kothari Commission on education and national development (1964-66) suggested that in tribal areas, for the first two years of school, the medium of instruction and books should be in the local tribal language. The regional language should be taught separately and should become the medium of instruction by the third year.
4. The Right to Education Act, 2009, also said that as far as possible, the medium of instruction in school should be the child’s mother tongue.

Challenges:

- India has several languages, the 2011 census identified 270 mother tongues and classrooms might have children with more than one spoken language.
- It might not be possible for all languages to become the medium of instruction and it might not be possible for large parts of the country to implement this.
- The NEP makes no mention of how this change in the medium of instruction is to be funded.
- The initial investment in bilingual programmes can be high because of the additional cost of developing new learning material especially for languages that have not been standardised or do not have a script. It would also require teachers

trained to teach in a multilingual classroom and new teachers fluent in these languages.

- Since **education is a concurrent subject** most states have their own **school boards**. Therefore, state governments would have to be brought on board for actual implementation of this decision

Way Forward:

- ✓ The policy aims for the **all-round growth of every student** in scholastic and co-scholastic domains and emphasises educating the students, teachers, and parents to nurture their potential to serve the nation.
- ✓ Trying an MLE model out in some schools across the country for about three-four years, identifying the problems in implementation and the cost of change and then preparing an action plan that resolves these problems.
- ✓ Its flexibility allows learners to select their preferred field of study and subsequent path in life following their academic and professional inclination and interests.
- ✓ The policy will **prove extremely beneficial** in dismantling hierarchies and barriers between different knowledge streams by providing easy and accessible methodologies.
- ✓ It will promote co-curricular activities and learning techniques in professional and academic streams. This will pave the way for a **new multi/trans-disciplinary education system**.
- ✓ The NEP will help to replace the rote method of learning and examination-based education with a system based on **conceptual understanding that aims to hone the student’s analytical skills**

Link: <https://youtu.be/3YxIHJa5L30>

4. National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)

Introduction:

National Health Authority (NHA), which is the implementing agency for the **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**, has also been working on creating a digital health ecosystem, complete with a personal health ID for every Indian, identifiers for doctors and health facilities and personal health records.

What is the mission about?

1. The mission envisages an integrated platform for the healthcare in the country. The platform will serve as the focal point of a complete digital health ecosystem.
2. It will contain:
 - a. personal health ID for every Indian
 - b. digitised health records
 - c. registry of doctors
 - d. registry of health facilities across the country
 - e. registry of e-pharmacy and telemedicine services

Highlights of the National Digital Health Blueprint (NDHB):

1. It lays out the 'building blocks' for the implementation of the **National Health Stack (NHS)**, which aims to deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) in leveraging health records.
2. Keeping true to the government's larger agenda, of 'data as a public good', the blueprint proposes the **linking of multiple databases to generate greater and granular data that can be leveraged by the public as well as private sector – including insurance companies, hospitals, apps and researchers.**
3. The blueprint proposes a **National Digital Health Mission** "as a purely government organisation with complete functional autonomy adopting some features of some of the existing National Information Utilities like UIDAI and GSTN."

Objectives:

1. **To establish national and regional registries to create single source of truth** in respect of Clinical Establishments, Healthcare Professionals, Health Workers and Pharmacies.
2. **Creating a system of Personal Health Records** accessible to the citizens and to the service providers based on citizen-consent.
3. **Promoting the adoption of open standards by all the actors** in the National Digital Health Ecosystem.
4. **Promoting Health Data Analytics** and Medical Research.

How will it help?

1. It will ensure interoperability of dispersed healthcare data
2. Good quality collection, storage and dissemination of health data
3. Rich resource of health data that can be used for Research & development purposes using Big Data analytics, artificial intelligence etc.
4. Spur in the entrepreneurial activity – mobile applications to facilitate both patients and doctors
5. Easier and effective monitoring of outbreaks like that of Japanese encephalitis, dengue, malaria, novel coronavirus etc.
6. Effective monitoring and assessment of various health schemes
7. Electronic records minimise possibilities of errors, tampering, damage
8. Important for development of the fields of the future – precision medicine, gene-based therapies etc

Concerns:

1. This National Blueprint illustrates yet another example of **the Centre moving forward with a major digitisation program involving the data of millions of citizens without a data protection law in place.**



2. Data security is a prerequisite for any data movement. Currently, data privacy in health is a gray area.
3. Data researchers and activists have expressed concerns about the development of this policy, which proposes a **health data set-up on a foundation of India Stack** – a bouquet of privately-owned proprietary software applications.

Scope of NDHM:

1. The NDHB described in the previous chapters indicates, at different places, the contours of the Scope of work to be done if a digital health eco-system is to be established in the country.
2. It is necessary to identify, collate and analyze all these work items to know the precise scope of NDHM. The following requirements culled from the previous chapters help us define the Scope more precisely:
 1. Health and Well-being for ALL;
 2. Health and Well-being at ALL Ages;
 3. Universal Health Coverage;
 4. Citizen-centric Services;
 5. Quality of Care;
 6. Accountability for Performance;
 7. Efficiency and Effectiveness in delivery of services;
 8. Creation of a holistic and comprehensive health eco-system.
 9. The Action Plan must be designed to ensure that the scope as above is well-served.

Expected Outcomes:

1. It is essential that clear outcomes are laid down for a major initiative like the NDHM,

so that all the stakeholders can work towards achieving a common set of goals.

2. The outcomes listed here are again culled from the previous chapters and collated for a holistic view. The various artefacts and deliverables of NDHM should be designed and developed in such a manner as to enable us to move in the direction of the outcomes.
3. All citizens should be able to access their Electronic Health Records in a convenient manner, preferably within 5 clicks.
4. Citizens need to undergo any diagnostic test ONCE ONLY, during the course of an episode, despite taking treatment from different health service providers.
5. Citizens should get Integrated Health Services at a single point, though multiple agencies/ departments/ services providers are involved;
6. NDHM shall assure Continuum of Care to the citizens, across primary, secondary and tertiary care and across public and private service providers;
7. A framework for Unified Communication Centre will be prepared to facilitate voice-based services and outreach;
8. NDHM shall support national portability for healthcare services;
9. Privacy of personal and health data, and consent-based access of EHRs will be the inviolable norm that shall be complied by all systems and stakeholders;
10. NDHM will be aligned to the SDG's related to health;
11. NDHM will enable evidence-based interventions in the area of public health;
12. Above all, the analytical capabilities of NDHM will support data-driven decision-making and policy analysis.

Link: <https://youtu.be/imniPr02WRU>

5. Covid-19 & Mental Health

Many psychological problems and important consequences in terms of mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, frustration, uncertainty during COVID-19 outbreak emerged progressively.

- Common psychological reactions related to the mass quarantine which was imposed in order to attenuate the COVID-19 spread are generalized fear and pervasive community anxiety which are typically associated with

disease outbreaks, and increased with the escalation of new cases together with inadequate, anxiety-provoking information which was provided by media.

- The psychological reactions to COVID-19 pandemic may vary from a panic behavior or collective hysteria to pervasive feelings of hopelessness and desperation which are associated with negative outcomes including suicidal behavior. Importantly, other health measures may be compromised by abnormally elevated anxiety.

Aspecific and uncontrolled fears related to infection:

1. This is commonly one of the most frequent psychological reaction to pandemics.
2. Several existing studies demonstrated that those who have been exposed to the risk of infection may develop pervasive fears about their health, worries to infect others and fear infecting family members.
3. Other studies reported that pregnant women and individuals with young children are the most at risk to develop the fear of becoming infected or transmitting the virus.

Pervasive anxiety:

- Social isolation related to restrictions and lockdown measures are linked to feelings of uncertainty for the future, fear of new and unknown infective agents resulting in abnormally increased anxiety.

Frustration and boredom:

- Distress, boredom, social isolation and frustration are directly related to confinement, abnormally reduced social/physical contact with others, and loss of usual habits.
- Frustration and pervasive loneliness seem to derive by the inhibition from daily activities, interruption of social necessities, not taking part in social networking activities..

Disabling loneliness:

1. The final effect of social isolation is pervasive loneliness and boredom, which have potential dramatic effects on both physical and mental individual well-being.
2. Pervasive loneliness may be significantly associated with increased depression and suicidal behavior.
3. Unfortunately, the isolation is progressively enhanced by anxiety, panic or collective hysteria.
4. Overall, it is well known that long periods of social isolation or quarantine for specific illnesses may have detrimental effects on mental well-being.

Risk factors:

Alexithymia

- The risk of related quarantine distress may be also due to the presence of alexithymic traits which may reduce psychological resilience in some subgroups of individuals.
- Alexithymic individuals may show significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression and psychological distress than non-alexithymics.

Inadequate supplies

- Feelings of frustration and uncertainty tend to occur even in relation with inadequate basic supplies (e.g. food, water, clothes etc.) during the quarantine period which is a major source of worries, and anxiety/anger even after 4–6 months from quarantine.

Inadequate information

- Existing evidence suggest that the poor or inadequate information from public health authorities may be a significant stressor because it provides inappropriate guidelines concerning call for actions or leads to confusion about the purpose of quarantine or the importance of measures needed to interrupt the pandemic spread.

- Confusion may be directly related to different approaches, contradictory health messages, and poor coordination

Protective factors:

1. Resilience

- a) Psychological resilience may be generally defined as the ability to support or retrieve psychological well-being during or after addressing stressful disabling conditions.

2. Social support

- a) A higher and significant perception of social support is associated with a reduced likelihood to develop psychological distress and psychiatric conditions.
- b) Adequate social support for the general population with regard to specific at risk populations (e.g. infected patients, quarantined individuals and medical professionals) should be provided by offering targeted, tailored messages according to the most reliable scientific evidence.
- c) Relevantly, a variety of mental health supporting strategies are required in pandemic areas in order to facilitate lifestyle changes and re-adaptation activities required after the occurrence of invalidating outbreaks.

Way Forward:

- ✓ Specific preventive strategies at the community level such as (i) implementing effective communication and (ii) providing adequate psychological services should be carried out in order to attenuate the psychological and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 outbreak.
- ✓ Health education needs to be enhanced using online platforms, social fear related to COVID-19 needs to be correctly addressed while stigma and discrimination need to be recognized as major challenges able to

reinforce the feelings of uncertainty in a period of social crisis.

- ✓ Hospitals protocols linked to the early and effective management of health emergency need to be implemented while healthcare professionals need to be supplied by adequate protective facilities.
- ✓ Scientific community should provide appropriate information to attenuate the impact of anxiety, frustration, and all the negative emotions which represent important barriers to the correct management of social crisis and psychological consequences related to pandemic.
- ✓ Unmet needs should be rapidly identified by medical staff who need to communicate frequently and in a timely manner with most of patients to understand the risk to develop new symptoms or worsen a preexisting psychological distress.
- ✓ Furthermore, telephones helplines, Internet access, active social networks, dedicated blogs and forums should be implemented in order to reduce social isolation and loneliness as well as allow to specific populations (e.g. infected subjects in hospitals or quarantine settings) the successful communication with their loved ones.
- ✓ Marginalized populations such as elderly individuals or those with psychological problems should be able to actively consult with clinical psychotherapists to rapidly detect warning signs.
- ✓ Telemedicine should be really implemented especially in areas where mental health services are poorly represented or severely impaired by the rapid spread of pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Implementing community-based strategies to support resilience and psychologically vulnerable individuals during the COVID-19 crisis is fundamental for any community.
- ❖ The psychological impact of fear and anxiety induced by the rapid spread of pandemic needs to be clearly recognized as a public health priority for both authorities

and policy makers who should rapidly adopt clear behavioral strategies to reduce the burden of disease and the dramatic mental health consequences of this outbreak.

Link: <https://youtu.be/wsvTYfvERwE>

6. Governance Index

Introduction:

The government released a good governance index to assess the state of governance in the country. States and Union Territories were divided into three groups. They were measured on 50 indicators in 10 sectors of governance. **Tamil Nadu emerged on top of the Index among 18 big states** in the country. In the **north-east and hill category, Himachal Pradesh** topped the ranking, **Puducherry stood first among union territories**

Good Governance Day:

1. Good Governance Day is observed in India annually on the twenty-fifth day of December, the **birth anniversary** of former-Prime Minister **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**.
2. Good Governance Day was established in **2014** to honor Prime Minister Vajpayee by fostering awareness among the Indian people of accountability in government.
3. In keeping with this principle, the Government of India has decreed Good Governance Day to be a working day for the government
4. On 23 December 2014, the ninety-year old former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (posthumously) were announced as recipients of India's highest civilian award for merit, the Bharat Ratna, by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee.
5. Following the announcement, the newly elected administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi established that the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister would be henceforth commemorated annually in India as Good Governance Day.

The Good Governance Index:

1. It is a **uniform tool across States to assess the Status of Governance and impact of**

various interventions taken up by the State Government and UTs.

2. The Minister said that good governance initiatives by the Government draw inspiration from former PM Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji.
3. He added that good governance initiatives are being replicated not only by the states in India, but also by the other countries. He added that many regional conferences have been organized by the DARPG in different parts across India to replicate good governance practices.
4. The purpose behind developing a comprehensive index, termed as Good Governance Index (GGI), is to create a tool which can be used uniformly across the state, and eventually district level, to assess the status of governance and impact of various interventions taken up by Central and State Governments including Union Territories (UTs).
5. Another significant contribution of the GGI would be contributing in tracking the progress of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at state level.**

Objectives:

1. The objectives of GGI are to **provide quantifiable data to compare the state of governance** in all states and UTs.
2. Enable states and UTs to formulate and implement suitable strategies for improving governance and shift to result oriented approaches and administration.
3. Various principles have been kept in mind while selecting the indicators, i.e. it should be easy to understand & calculate, citizen-centric & result driven, leading to improved results and applicable to all states and UTs, among others. Various consultation meetings were held with the stakeholders,

including consultations with sector experts, ministries, states & UTs.

The GGI takes into consideration **ten sectors**:

1. Agriculture and Allied Sectors
2. Commerce & Industries
3. Human Resource Development
4. Public Health
5. Public Infrastructure & Utilities,
6. Economic Governance,
7. Social Welfare & Development
8. Judicial & Public Security
9. Environment
10. Citizen-Centric Governance.

These ten Governance Sectors are measured on total 50 indicators. Difference indicators are given different weightage under one Governance Sector to calculate the value. E.g. Under Agriculture & Allied Sector, there are 6 indicators with different weightage, namely: Growth rate of agriculture and allied sector (0.4), growth rate of food grains production (0.1), growth rate of horticulture produce (0.1), growth rate of milk production (0.1), growth rate of meat production (0.1) and crop insurance (0.2).

Categories:

The states and UTs are divided into three groups:

1. Big States,
2. North-East & Hill States and
3. UTs.

The states and UTs are ranked on all indicators separately, at the same time composite ranking is also calculated for these states and UTs under their respective groups based upon these indicators.

Key Findings of the first GGI Report:

1. **Top performers among the big states:** Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat.
2. **The bottom six states** are Odisha, Bihar, Goa, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand.
3. **Among the North-East & Hill States:** Top 3 states are Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Tripura.

4. The bottom 3 states are Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
5. **Pondicherry leads among the UTs** followed closely by Chandigarh with Delhi bagging the third spot. Lakshadweep is at the bottom among the UTs.

Sector-wise ranking:

1. **In the environment sector:** The top three states are West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The bottom 3 states are Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Goa.
2. **Agriculture and Allied Sectors:** Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan are at the top
3. **Commerce & Industries:** Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana are at the top
4. **Human Resource Development:** Goa is at the top.
5. **Judicial and public security ranking:** West Bengal is at the bottom two in the judicial and public security ranking. Tamil Nadu tops the chart here.
6. **Economic governance:** Karnataka is at the top under the economic governance category.
7. **Health:** Kerala is at the top in the public health sector.

Limitations:

1. The limitations of the index are determined largely by **the availability of data**, which can be overcome with time as data becomes available from authentic and reliable government sources.
2. While agreeing the importance of input and process based indicators, the framework is also **limited by its focus only on outcome/output based indicators.**
3. The purpose of selection of such indicators is to keep the focus on performance and achievements of the State Governments and also to limit the number of indicators for implementation purpose.

Link: https://youtu.be/Q7Mb_iGocEE

7. India's Act East Policy

Introduction:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said India will consider whether its concerns and interests in trade in goods, services, and investments are being fully accommodated when he attends the meeting of the RCEP there. PM Modi was in Bangkok to participate in the 16th ASEAN-India Summit. He attended the 14th East Asia Summit and the 3rd Summit meeting of nations negotiating a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). In his departure statement, Prime Minister said ASEAN related Summits are key elements of India's foreign policy, most notably our Act East Policy. Highlighting the importance of East Asia Summit, Prime Minister said it gives an opportunity to present our vision for the Indo-Pacific region. The Prime Minister added that during the visit, he will also hold bilateral meetings with a number of other world leaders present in the Thai capital for related summit meetings.

Look East policy:

1. India's **Look East policy** is an effort to **cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia** to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China.
2. Initiated in 1991, it marked a strategic shift in India's perspective of the world.
3. It was developed and enacted during the government of Prime Minister Narsimha Rao and rigorously pursued by the successive administrations of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh.
4. The success of Look East policy enthused the Mandarins of South-Block to develop the policy into more action oriented, project and outcome based policy.
5. After a couple of decades, India's Act-East Policy, which was announced in 2014 by the Prime minister Narendra Modi's administration, became a successor to the Look-East Policy

Act East policy:

1. India's Act East Policy focusses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation.
3. Act East Policy has placed emphasis on India-ASEAN cooperation in our domestic agenda on infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, skills, urban renewal, smart cities, Make in India and other initiatives.
4. Connectivity projects, cooperation in space, S&T and people-to-people exchanges could become a springboard for regional integration and prosperity.
5. The Objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood.
6. The North East of India has been a priority in our Act East Policy (AEP).
7. AEP provides an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh and the ASEAN region.
8. Various plans at bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of Northeast with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people-to-people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power, etc.). Some of the major projects include Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project, the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, Rhi-Tiddim Road Project, Border Haats, etc.

Strategic angle of act east policy:-

1. Indo pacific :-

1. For India, the centrality of ASEAN and Southeast Asia is essential for **peace and prosperity** of the Indo-Pacific region. Its engagement with the 10-nation bloc is at the core of New Delhi's strategic perspective for the region and its 'Act East' policy.
2. Widening the security cooperation under the proposed quadrilateral coalition, officials of India, the US, Japan and Australia had held extensive talks on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila for pursuing common interests in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region.

2. China factor:-

1. China's aggressive posturing in the South China Sea and growing influence in the Indian Ocean region, India's focus on act east policy is necessity.

3. Maritime goals:-

1. India and the ASEAN countries are maritime nations, and their goal is to evolve a regional architecture based on the twin principles of shared security, and shared prosperity.
2. Both India and ASEAN share a common vision for global commerce and the maritime domain.
4. Both the parties working closely with the regional bloc in a range of activities like developing a **blue economy, coastal surveillance, building off-shore patrolling capabilities, hydrographic services, and information sharing for increased maritime domain awareness.**

5. ASEAN:-

1. Both India and ASEAN have a common vision for the future, built on commitment to inclusion and integration, belief in sovereign equality of all nations irrespective of size, and support for free and

open pathways of commerce and engagement.

2. Along the way, from dialogue partners, ASEAN and India have become strategic partners.
3. Both have broad-based partnership through 30 mechanisms. Partnership in ASEAN-led institutions like the East Asia Summit, ADMM+ (ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus) and ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) is advancing peace and stability in the region.
4. Range of key issues including effectively tackling threat of terrorism, boosting maritime security cooperation and enhancing connectivity were the other areas of deliberations at the India-ASEAN commemorative summit.
5. **For Asean, India not only offers a huge domestic market with growing aspirational middle class** but also a growing working population which is not the case with other economies such as Korea, Japan or China where the working population is on the decline.
6. **Focusing on trade in services with Asean will give India an opportunity to use its competitive strength to become a services export hub** to the Asean region.
7. Further, being a part of the AEC (Asean Economic Community), RCEP and having strong relations with Asean through the existing FTA will not only **facilitate further economic reforms in India but also assist the country in establishing itself as a growing economic power in Asia.**

6. Indonesia:-

1. Indonesia remains a key player within Southeast Asia for several reasons. **Most clearly, Indonesia will be essential in extending India's maritime outreach.** It has a

- total of maritime areas of 6,400,000 square kilometers, including its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
2. The distance from India's Andaman Islands to Indonesia's Aceh province is barely 80 nautical miles, underscoring the importance to both India and Indonesia of the importance of enhanced maritime cooperation for the continuing peace, stability and economic prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.
 3. The two navies have partnered in **naval exercises** for several years now with naval ships patrolling between the Andaman Sea and Malacca Straits.
 4. Both countries emphasise also the importance of **rule of law**, in particular the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS)
 5. Indonesia has also shown some interest in joining the Bay of Bengal initiative, which appears sensible both from an economic and security perspective.
 6. India has also shown interest in joining the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP), a four-nation arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand for exchange of intelligence, and coordinated air and sea patrol through the Malacca Straits.
 7. **Vietnam has extended an Indian oil concession in the South China Sea to India.**
 8. **Singapore:-**
 1. Singapore is a window to the heritage of India's ties to the region, the progress of the present and the potential of the future. Singapore was a bridge between India and ASEAN.
 9. **RCEP:-**
 1. India is also interested in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, seeking a comprehensive, balanced and fair agreement for all 16 participants.

10. Myanmar and Thailand:

1. **Stronger relations between India and Myanmar have also helped to quell insurgency and extremism in the north-eastern states of India.** Peace, stability and security of north-east India will be further preserved and promoted with more robust ties and understanding with Myanmar
2. **Connectivity projects, viz., the Trilateral Highway between north-east India and Myanmar and onwards to Thailand (and Laos and Vietnam) as well as the Kaladan multi-modal transit and transport project,** have been under implementation for several years

Challenges:

- India has a **trade deficit with all RCEP** countries which is around 107B\$.
- RCEP has not addressed India's needs in **services, skilled labour mobility**.
- Our past experiences in 17 FTA's countries shows that we are not able to take full advantage of it.
- We have not taken any major measures since early 1990's.
- China is surrounding India by building ports.

Way forward:

- ✓ **Success of Act East policy** will also define the difference we are able to make to the life and commerce of our people in the north-east because there the connectivity becomes extremely important.
- ✓ We are already doing that but more needs to be done in collaborating with countries in South China Sea.
- ✓ India must continue to focus on further **strengthening collaboration with ASEAN nations** and others.
- ✓ India's **bureaucratic shift** is an important move to articulate its regional policy more cogently, coherently and with a renewed sense of purpose.
- ✓ Partners must work to **promote economic revival, seek strategic cooperation to fight**

terrorism, and enhance maritime security and defense cooperation.

- ✓ **Soft power** such as Buddhism, tourism, people-to-people contacts, and cultural ties with the region must continue to be harnessed.
- ✓ Beyond, but linked to ASEAN, India must further **strengthen strategic and economic ties with the U.S., Japan, Korea, Australia, and also with China.**

- ✓ Important sectors like technology transfer, civilian nuclear cooperation, defence, and innovation should be given priority
- ✓ Continuous engagement with China too is necessary to expand cooperation, particularly on the economic front.

Link: <https://youtu.be/pWHZ5BT1Oec>

GENERAL STUDIES III

1. India's Coal sector reforms

Introduction:

The Centre launched the auction of 41 coal blocks for **commercial mining**, with the Prime Minister formally giving the green signal and expressed optimism that it will help in reducing dependency on imports. The move is aimed at reviving the auction process, which has remained in limbo with only 31 coal blocks having been auctioned since 2014, when the NDA had first come to power on the promise of bringing transparency in the sector in the aftermath of the 'coalgate' scam. Modi said that the Centre has allowed commercial mining under its Aatmanirbhar Bharat package, with the aim of making India among the biggest exporters of the dry fuel. He also stressed on the irony that **India is the second largest coal importer**, despite having the world's **fourth largest coal reserves** and being the **second largest producer**

Coal sector in India:

1. Despite having the **world's fourth largest coal reserves**, India imported 235 million tonnes (mt) of coal last year, of which **135mt** valued at Rs.171,000 crore could have been met from domestic reserves.
2. **India's state-run coal giant** has been **unable to meet growing demand** despite abundant resources.
3. The South Asian nation depends on Coal India for **more than 80 per cent** of its **domestic production** and the miner has consistently fallen short of production targets in the last few years.

4. The government has been **progressively liberalizing** the coal sector over the last several months to attract new investments, and getting rid of this archaic end-use restriction was a key step.

Procedure established till now in Coal Mining:

1. Until now there were **restrictions** on who could **bid for coal mines** only those in power, iron and steel and coal washery business could bid for mines and the bidders needed prior experience of mining in India.
2. This effectively **limited the potential bidders** to a select circle of players and thus **limited the value** that the government could extract from the bidding.
3. Second, **end-use restrictions** inhibited the development of a domestic market for coal.
4. The ordinance essentially **democratises the coal industry** and makes it attractive for merchant mining companies, including multinationals such as BHP and Rio Tinto, to look at India.
5. The move was overdue considering that the **country spent a huge Rs.1,71,000 crore in coal imports last year to buy 235 million tonnes**; of that, 100 million tonnes was not substitutable, as the grade was not available in India.
6. But the balance **135 million tonnes** could have been **substituted by domestic production had it been available.**

What is commercial mining?

1. Commercial mining allows the private sector to mine coal commercially without placing any end-use restrictions. The private firms have the option of either gasification of the coal or exporting it.
2. They can also use it in their own end-use plants or sell them in the markets. The government expects more than Rs 33,000 crore of capital investments over the next five to seven years in the sector.
3. Further, with 100 per cent foreign direct investment allowed in the coal sector, global companies can also participate in the auctions. The complete freedom to decide on sale, pricing, and captive utilisation is expected to attract many private sector firms to participate in the auction process.
4. The government expects these steps will generate employment and reduce India's import bill.

Why it is a transformative reform?

1. Over the years, our coal imports have been steadily rising to meet our domestic demand. In the wake of recent disruption of global supply chains and India's call for self-reliance, it is imperative that we allow our private sector to mine coal in India and for India. With nationalised coal mines failing to meet our demand, commercial coal mining is the only pansacea for India to get rid of coal imports, achieve energy security and reduce import bill.
2. Commercial mining licences with regulatory oversight and monitoring will facilitate employment opportunities for tribal communities and local populations.
3. The revenues of states are bound to receive a substantial jump when commercial mining starts in these states
4. Entry of private sector in the coal sector has immense forward and backward linkages. The backward linkage of transportation and physical infrastructure is bound to create clusters of growth. In forward linkage, sectors such as cement, fertilisers, steel, and aluminium will bolster tremendous growth.

5. The entry of the latest global mining technology, management and competition is bound to revamp the sector from inside.
6. For many, the blanket objection is the adverse impact on the environment. They should realise that India continues to import coal. At least when we are mining coal within the country, we can take all the necessary precautions.

Was the private sector never allowed in mining?

1. Private sector participation was permitted until the early 1970s. The Indira Gandhi government announced the nationalisation of the coal blocks in two phases between 1971 and 1973.
2. The Modi government's reforms will effectively end state-owned Coal India's monopoly over mining and selling of coal.

Is this the first attempt by govt to open up the sector?

1. After the Supreme Court cancelled the coal block allocations made to the private sector by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government in 2014, the Narendra Modi dispensation had brought in the Coal Mines (Special provisions) Act of 2015 to return these coal blocks to the private sector through auctions.
2. But there had been end-use restrictions and the private sector was not allowed to trade into the market making it unattractive for the private sector. Further in 2018, private sector firms were allowed to sell upto 25 per cent of the output in the market, but this also saw a lukewarm response from the private sector.
3. Meanwhile, sectors like power, aluminium and steel are likely to be the biggest beneficiaries with enhanced availability of coal.
4. India imports nearly 250 million tonnes of coal from other countries despite having the world's fourth largest coal reserve.
5. The government is hoping that the involvement of the private sector will increase production and make India self-

sufficient in meeting its internal coal requirements.

Link: https://youtu.be/XrLK_Y2ijVA

2. Making India a manufacturing hub

Introduction:

On June 20, Prime Minister Modi, in a 165-minute virtual interaction with Ministers asked them to put the economy on a growth trajectory. For this purpose, he asked the Ministers for ideas which can transform India into a global manufacturing hub. In the virtual interaction, the discussion was mainly about China and the manufacturing challenges faced by India. Earlier, Prime Minister Modi gave a mantra 'vocal for local' during his address to the nation on May 12, 2020. The idea was to promote local brands and goods. He further stated that the brands which are global today were once local. More recently, the clamour has become louder to make India a global manufacturing hub, especially considering the China situation. In the 1980s, China began as a producer of low-end products and in 2010; it became the largest manufacturer in the world, overtaking the US in all the sectors— drugs to electronics. In 2018, as per UN data, China accounts for 28% of the global manufacturing output.

Issues of manufacturing sector amid Lockdown:

1. India's manufacturing activity **contracted at its sharpest pace on record** in April as a lockdown to combat the rapid spread of the coronavirus led to a slump in demand and massive supply chain disruptions
2. Asia's third largest economy is taking a huge hit from the ongoing nationwide lockdown, which started on March 25, and its gross domestic product is expected to shrink for the first time since the mid-1990s this quarter
3. Record **contractions in output, new orders and employment** pointed to a severe deterioration in demand conditions.
4. With new orders and output shrinking at the steepest pace since at least early 2005 factories cut jobs at the fastest rate in the survey's history, signaling a high chance of recession.
5. A **record slump in both input and output prices**, suggesting a sharp fall in overall

inflation which has held above the Reserve Bank of India's medium-term target of 4% for six months, failed to stoke demand

6. Enterprises suffer from low productivity given that their small size and lockdown prevents them from achieving economies of scale.
7. The jobs the small enterprises create are low-paying ones.
8. Numerous regulatory roadblocks, unfavourable land and labour laws, inadequate transport, communication and energy infrastructure, among others.
9. India faces stiff competition from South-East Asian and other South Asian countries.
10. Global technological and geo-economic changes.
11. Impact of a strong rupee in recent times on Indian industry and the economy.

Opportunities For India:

1. There are, however, opportunities that appears to be emerging.
2. While there is **hope for a quick recovery in India**, we have to make concerted efforts to realise this including an integrated multi-pronged approach through public policy support, private sector participation and citizens' support.
3. This presents a huge opportunity for India as many Companies plan to shift out of China. We need to prepare the **ground forthwith to welcome such investment into India**. We need to try and make life easy for investors.

Government Initiatives:

1. **Make in India** initiative with the primary goal of making India a global manufacturing hub.
2. **'Zero defect zero effect'** for MSMEs to deliver top quality products using clean technology.

3. **'SKILL INDIA'** – a multi-skill development programme with a mission for job creation and entrepreneurship.
4. Labour reforms through a dedicated Shram Suvidha Portal, Random Inspection Scheme, Universal Account Number and Apprentice Protsahan Yojana.
5. Defence Procurement Policy (DPP) under which the priority will be given to the indigenously made defence products.
6. Technology Acquisition and Development Fund (TADF) under the National Manufacturing Policy (NMP) to facilitate acquisition of Clean, Green and Energy Efficient Technologies by MSMEs.
7. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) for providing loans to small-scale businesses.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan: the right impetus:

1. **India** could be their **destination of choice**, provided we offer a conducive environment.
2. A **conductive business climate** with **better infrastructure and logistics, simplified land and labour laws and single window clearances** can enable India to develop a robust manufacturing ecosystem.
3. This will help **attract foreign capital, latest technology, create jobs and boost our exports**.
4. We must also **focus on Skill and Scale** to be **both quality and cost competitive and serve a global customer base**.
5. Huge scope exists in sectors such as pharma, electronics, automobiles and defence machinery, not only to be self-reliant but also capture a decent slice of the global supply chain.

Way Forward:

- ✓ **Investor's confidence** must be improved.
- ✓ **Improving physical infrastructure** from transport systems to the power sector is essential.
- ✓ Importance should be given to **electronic sector**.
- ✓ Improve **access to finance** for smaller enterprises.
- ✓ Making firm entry and exit easier.
- ✓ Inverted duty structure.
- ✓ Enhancing the flexibility of labour regulations.
- ✓ Low-cost manufacturing is important for India.
- ✓ If India has to raise its share of manufacturing in GDP to around 25%, industry will have to significantly step up its R&D expenditure. This must be addressed by the new industrial policy.
- ✓ The quantum of value addition has to be increased at all levels. Larger the value addition, greater the positive externalities.
- ✓ FDI policy requires a review to ensure that it facilitates greater technology transfer, leverages strategic linkages and innovation.
- ✓ Aim for higher job creation in the formal sector and performance linked tax incentives.
- ✓ Attractive remuneration to motivate people to join the manufacturing sector.
- ✓ Need to have a curriculum that focuses on soft-skills and value-based training that meets the demands of the industry.

Link: <https://youtu.be/7APMTTNHicQ>

3. National Infrastructure Pipeline Dashboard

Introduction:

Monitoring of all infrastructure projects under the ₹111-trillion National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) will be allowed on a digital platform to ensure access to updated project information for investments across various sectors, the finance ministry said on Monday. The projects will be

mapped and evaluated by the departments concerned and the finance ministry to monitor the implementation and actual progress, compared to the initial estimates of the NIP for each project. The move assumes significance as increased focus on infrastructure projects will help revive the economy following the covid-19 crisis.

1. The **National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)** is a group of social and economic infrastructure projects in India over a period of five years with a sanctioned amount of ₹102 lakh crore (US\$1.4 trillion).
2. The pipeline was first made public by the Prime Minister of India during his 2019 Independence Day speech. The Finance Minister announced that the NIP consists of 78% projects by the centre and states, and the remaining by the private sector.
3. The NIP is a pillar of government of India's aim to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2025.
4. The online dashboard is envisaged as a one stop solution for all stakeholders looking for information on infrastructure projects in New India. The dashboard is being hosted on the India Investment Grid (IIG).
5. In the budget speech of 2019-2020, Finance Minister announced an outlay of Rs 100 lakh Crore for infrastructure projects over the next 5 years.
6. NIP is a first-of-its-kind initiative to provide world-class infrastructure across the country and improve the quality of life for all citizens. It will improve project preparation, attract investments (both domestic & foreign) into infrastructure, and will be crucial for attaining the target of becoming a \$5 trillion economy by FY 2025. Covers both economic and social infrastructure projects.

Report by Task force:

- 1) The task force headed by Atanu Chakraborty on National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), in May 2020, submitted its final report to the Finance Minister.
- 2) Important recommendations and observations made:
 - a) Investment needed: ₹111 lakh crore over the next five years (2020-2025) to build infrastructure projects and drive economic growth. Energy, roads, railways and urban projects are estimated to account for the bulk of projects (around 70%).
 - b) The centre (39 percent) and state (40 percent) are expected to have an almost equal share in implementing the projects,

while the private sector has 21 percent share. Aggressive push towards asset sales. Monetisation of infrastructure assets. Setting up of development finance institutions.

- c) Strengthening the municipal bond market.

Why Infrastructure Development is necessary?

1. For a massive country such as India, improvement in infrastructure is a necessity.
2. Over the next decade, an estimated \$1.5 trillion is needed to create infrastructure, and overhaul and refurbish existing infrastructure.
3. Infrastructure development will generate growth, employment and pull people out of poverty.
4. Infrastructure development will benefit Government's Ease of Doing Business.
5. Developing Renewable Energy sector will help in mitigating climate change.
6. Infrastructure investments can also help improve peace and security by enabling, sustaining and enhancing societal living conditions.

Plethora of incomplete infrastructure projects:

1. Projects are launched without adequate ground preparation regarding the land requirement and project cost.
2. Lack of co-operation at the state level, which is a big hurdle since land acquisition is the state's business.
3. Informality and corruption in infrastructure project delivery and lack of performance pressure.
4. Environmental clearance delays, protest by the displaced populations and hurdles due to local politics.
5. In some cases tendering process is incomplete or the terms and conditions are unclear.
6. Lack of private sector funding.

Way Forward:

1. Improving the institutional capacity to implement infrastructure projects effectively is crucial.
2. Greater transparency and accountability structures are of fundamental importance to reduce wastage in infrastructure creation.
3. Sufficient financing for infrastructure by expanding the role of the private sector; pension funds and life insurance companies.
4. Regulatory measures are essential to avoid delays at each stage – from project approval to awarding of the contract, to its implementation.
5. Tenders and key contract features should be routinely published, and good record-keeping and quality control must be maintained throughout the process.
6. Strengthening of PPP route, as it has been able to deliver world class infrastructure in sectors such as airports.
7. In **2015**, the **Kelkar Committee** suggested overhauling of the PPP framework in India through measures such as funding through hybrid models and adoption of international best practices.

8. Ensure a robust regulatory environment for domestic and international funding of infrastructure by introducing an independent PPP regulator in India.

Conclusion

- ❖ Infrastructure is a key driver of the overall development of Indian economy.
- ❖ We can import capital, technology but infrastructure needs to be there with proper skilled people.
- ❖ It is seen that investments in infrastructure equal to 1% of GDP will result in GDP growth of at least 2% as infrastructure has a “multiplier effect” on economic growth across sectors.
- ❖ The recent headway made in developing transport infrastructure will prove to be the biggest enabler for growth. An efficient infrastructure can provide avenues for employment through trickle-down effect.
- ❖ India’s growth story should no longer be impeded by a lack of infrastructure, and the fruits of this growth should reach everyone in the remotest part of the country

Link: <https://youtu.be/D1vnOpYQ7ns>

4. SCIENCE MONITOR

Indo-U.S. Virtual Networks for COVID-19:

1. The Indo-US Science and Technology Forum (IUSSTF) announced the awards to eight binational teams, consisting of leading researchers from India and U.S for COVID-19 Indo-U.S. Virtual Networks in support of the efforts of the medical and scientific community to find solutions to the COVID 19 pandemic and emerging global challenges.
2. Eight binational teams consisting of researchers from India and the US have received awards to pursue cutting-edge research in pathogenesis and disease management of COVID-19 through Indo-US virtual networks.
3. The areas of research they will pursue include antiviral coatings, immune

modulation, tracking SARS CoV-2 in wastewater, disease detection mechanisms, reverse genetics strategies, and drug repurposing.

4. The IUSSTF is an autonomous bilateral organization jointly funded by the Governments of India and the US that promotes Science, Technology, Engineering and Innovation through substantive interaction among government, academia and industry. The Department of Science & Technology, Governments of India and the U.S. Department of States are respective nodal departments.
5. The eight teams are among the best few who had submitted proposals in response to an invitation of proposals to harness the combined expertise of the Indian and U.S. Science & Technology communities,

facilitate partnerships between teams of Indian and U.S. scientists and engineers currently engaged in COVID-related research, and leverage existing infrastructure from both countries to further advance the research and accelerate progress.

6. Following a rigorous binational peer-review process, these eight teams will be pursuing cutting-edge research in areas that include studies on pathogenesis and disease management in COVID-19, antiviral coatings, immune modulation, tracking SARS CoV-2 in wastewater, disease detection mechanisms, reverse genetics strategies, and drug repurposing.
7. The mission of the binational Indo-US Science and Technology Forum is to act as a catalyst to promote long-term scientific collaborations between India and the United States through partnerships amongst individual scientists, scientific institutions, and the scientific community at large.

Portable Hospital- SCTISCT:

1. The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the need to set up systems to improve health infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Portable hospitals for detecting, screening, identifying, isolating, and treating COVID-19 patients in local communities could soon be a solution to tackle the increasing demands for health infrastructure.
2. Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Govt. of India in collaboration with 'Modulus Housing' a start-up incubated by IIT Madras has come up with a solution using decentralised approach to detect, manage and treat COVID-19 patients in local communities through portable microstructures.
3. It comes equipped with a prefabrication modular technology and a telescopic frame that allows the model to be shrunk to 1/5th of its original size, which makes it convenient for storage and transportation

4. Foldable, portable, pre-fab hospitals that are easy to assemble on-site quickly provide a compelling solution to effectively addressing the needs of pandemics, disasters, and other contingencies
5. As of now, a 30 bedded hospital at a cost of 34 lakhs (INR) at Chengalpet, Chennai at SugaHhealthcorp Private Corporation, and another 12 bedded hospital in Waynad, Kerala at a cost of Rs 16 Lakh at Primary Health Care, Varadoor- Govt. Organisation have been successfully installed as four-zone hospitals
6. Researchers have developed the portable microstructure named as "MediCAB", which is modular, portable, durable, easy to set up and can be customised as per the requirements of the customer.
7. It is foldable and is composed of four zones – a doctor's room, an isolation room, a medical room/ward, and a twin-bed ICU, maintained at negative pressure.
8. It can be easily transported and installed anywhere in geographic locations and can be erected in just two hours with the help of four persons.
9. It comes equipped with a prefabrication modular technology and a telescopic frame that allows the model to be shrunk to 1/5th of its original size, which makes it convenient for storage and transportation.
10. These portable units come in three sizes – 200, 400, and 800 sqft. The units can be installed at the car parking or at the terrace of the hospital according to the needs or availability of space at the facility.

Silicosis- CSIR- CEERI- Dust Precipitator:

1. Silicosis is a major occupational health problem among people engaged in stone work. The lung disease occurs due to exposure to stone dust like silica among workers who do not use any protective gear.
2. Silica is a tiny crystal found in sand, rock and mineral ores like quartz. Now researchers from CSIR-CEERI, Pilani have developed a stone dust precipitator system that can help stone workers breathe easy.

3. Researchers have developed two variants of dust precipitator system – one for single artisan and another that can be used by four persons simultaneously.
4. The precipitator for single artisan collects tiny dust particles with its high suction power. This suction is about 10 times more than that of the inhaling power of human beings, it separates all the dust particles from the air and finally dissolve it in water. The sediment of this stone dust is drained through drain pot from time to time. The stone dust can then be reused. The system for four workers has some modifications as it has four suction branches around the system chamber. Each branch has individual control unit.
5. The precipitator can suck maximum dust particles and prevents pollution and exposure. It has self-filter cleaning technique makes it suitable for non-technical persons also and it is based on power saving technique.
6. During stone carving, the production of PM 2.5 and PM 10 is very high. The PM 2.5 is mainly responsible for silicosis. When the dust precipitator system is used, all the dust particles produced at the time of stone carving is sucked out by the system. Thus dust particles can not reach the mouth of the stone artisans and it can help in saving the person from inhaling it.
7. In India, the prevalence of silicosis ranges widely from 3.5% in ordnance factory to 54.6% in the slate-pencil industry. This variation in prevalence is due to the silica concentrations in different work environment, the job demands and duration of exposure. It is prevalent in Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Pondicherry, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal among the workers of construction and mining.
8. Silicosis is an incurable condition with its potential to cause permanent physical disability. As there is no effective specific treatment of silicosis is available the only way to protect workers' health is control of exposure to silica-containing dusts.

Akshay Urja Diwas 2020:

1. **Akshay Urja diwas** is an awareness campaign about the developments of renewable energy in India, celebrated on August 20 every year since 2004.
2. The Indian Ministry for New & Renewable Energy Sources initiated **Akshay Urja Day** (Diwas) in 2004.
3. The day commemorates the birthday of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.
4. The Ministry for New & Renewable Energy Sources, Govt. of India promotes innovation to adopt renewable energy sources to produce power for the electricity grid and for several standalone applications and decentralised power production.
5. The energy such as Biogas, Solar Energy, Wind energy, hydroelectrical power are few example of Akshay Urja. It is essential to develop way to use akshay urja or renewable energy more efficiently.
6. The main motive of Akshya urja Diwas is to make people aware that they have to think about the renewable energy (Akshya Urja) apart from tradition energy, The energy which we are getting naturally doesn't have any side effect on environment, and by using this energy we can use the traditional energy for more long time

Link: <https://youtu.be/HDxK9pFuYkw>

15.08.2020

MoEFCC -World Elephant Day:

1. It is observed on 12 August annually to make people understand to preserve and protect the giant animal elephant. This is the way to bring the world together to help elephants. Therefore, it is necessary to raise awareness about the urgency to protect such an intelligent and huge animal from extinction.
2. On August 12, 2012, the inaugural World Elephant Day was launched to bring attention to the urgent plight of Asian and African elephants. The elephant is loved, revered and respected by people and cultures around the world, yet we balance

on the brink of seeing the last of this magnificent creature.

3. The escalation of poaching, habitat loss, human-elephant conflict and mistreatment in captivity are just some of the threats to both African and Asian elephants. Working towards better protection for wild elephants, improving enforcement policies to prevent the illegal poaching and trade of ivory, conserving elephant habitats, better treatment for captive elephants and, when appropriate, reintroducing captive elephants into natural, protected sanctuaries are the goals that numerous elephant conservation organizations are focusing on around the world
4. The best way to celebrate the day is to educate yourself and others about this magnificent animal that is an elephant. It is necessary to raise issues that these animals' faces and social media is the best platform for this. People watch documentary on elephants as this makes us realise about wildlife and about problems that animals face which can be an eye-opener. People donate on this day to a foundation dedicated to protecting elephants from poachers or relocating them to locations better suited their needs.
5. Union Environment Minister released a document on Best Practices and launched a beta version of the portal on Human-Elephant Conflict on the eve of World Elephant Day. The National Portal on human-elephant conflict called "Surakhsya".
6. It is for the collection of real-time information and also for managing the conflicts on a real-time basis. It will also help to set the data collection protocols, data transmission pipelines, and data visualization tools to enable policy-makers to leverage HEC data for policy formulation and preparation of Action Plans for mitigation of conflicts.
7. To stop killing elephants MIKE (Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants) programme was established by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) by Resolution 10.10 adopted at the tenth

Conference of the Parties in 1997. Around 28 sites participating in the MIKE programme in Asia which are distributed around 13 countries.

IIA Founder's Day Lecture by Prof. VijayRaghavn:

1. The Founder's Day in the 50th year of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) was celebrated with dignitaries emphasizing the need to maintain the energy and enthusiasm created by its founder Dr. VainuBappu by fusing the new ideas of young people with the wisdom and experience gained over five decades.
2. Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) an autonomous institute of the Department of Science & Technology (DST), Govt. of India celebrated its Founder's Day on 10th August 2020 through an online program in which the Founder's Day lecture was delivered by Principal Scientific Advisor Government of India, Professor K. VijayRaghavan.
3. The institute celebrates the birthday of Dr. Manali KallatVainuBappu, who contributed to the establishment of the modern Indian Institute of Astrophysics, as Founders Day. IIA has stepped into 50 years of existence with this year's Founder's Day.
4. IIA has done extremely well in producing quality human resources, infrastructure, and providing observational astronomy and deep science and will continue to flourish and scale greater heights with right resources and vision," he added.
5. Astrophysics is the science of physical processes in the cosmos. It uses data gathered by astronomers using telescopes on Earth and in space – combined with the laws and theories of physics – in order to interpret the universe around us. If astronomy asks *what* and *where*, astrophysics asks *how* and *why*. A sister science – planetary science – studies the planets in our solar system and distant solar systems in our Milky Way galaxy. Another sister science – cosmology – studies external galaxies and voids, and the large-scale structure and history of the universe.

ARCI nano-coating for solar panels:

1. Scientists at the International Advanced Research Centre for Powder Metallurgy and New Materials (ARCI), an autonomous organization of the Department of Science and Technology, have developed nanoparticle-based coating for solar panels that can minimize dust deposition and enables easy cleaning by the action of water. It can prevent a reduction in efficiency of the panels due to soiling.
2. Solar panels are exposed to sunlight in open areas to achieve high conversion efficiencies, resulting in continuous contact of solar panels with severe weather conditions, dust and so on. Accordingly, solar panels are designed to withstand humid, corrosive, and dust-laden atmosphere for many years to provide a stable and reliable operation.
3. Moreover, their conversion efficiencies, typically in the 20% range, are reduced due to soiling by dust, dirt, pollen, and other particles that accumulate on the solar panels over a period of time. The power production capabilities of an unclean solar module in high dust area can drop by 30-40% within 1-2 months. The surface of a solar panel having super-hydrophobic coating replicates lotus leaf features.
4. The sprinkling of water effectively washes off the dust and other contaminants from the panel surface, similar to that of a lotus leaf. But most such products developed in the US and Europe are suitable for mild weather conditions and cannot tolerate harsh environmental conditions prevalent in India.
5. India also has the highest average soiling rate of 0.6 % per day as compared to 0.1 % in the US, 0.05 % in Japan and 0.02 % in Germany. This could be the most disconcerting phenomenon for solar power generation, specially when the country is aiming for a leap in solar power production.
6. So, there is an enormous requirement for self-cleaning (Easy-to-Clean) coatings on solar panels to encounter severe environmental conditions (high dust/dirt, high humidity, and corrosion).
7. Scientists at ARCI developed a high performance transparent easy-to-clean coating using functional nanoparticles, which stand out by its suitability for extreme Indian conditions of high temperature, humidity, varied natures of high pollutant level. This coating technology is suitable for easy application in an existing PV power generation field by simple spray and wipes techniques. This novel coating reduces the amount of dust deposited on the solar panels and cleans itself by the action of water on the modules.
8. The key features of this novel coating are its low cost highly transparent nature (no loss in transmittance or power conversion efficiency), super-hydrophobic property (water contact angle more than 110°), high weather stability and high mechanical stability. It has a simple coating technique, easy scalability, curability at ambient temperature and can withstand long duration accelerated test.
9. This coating has been validated in the laboratory conditions as per the international standards and successfully validated on ground-mounted and rooftop solar power plants located at various places in the country.

IIT M remote monitoring solutions for COVID-19 patients:

1. IT Madras' Healthcare Technology Innovation Centre (HTIC) and Helyxon, a healthcare startup in IIT Madras Research Park, announced the successful deployment of remote patient monitoring solutions for Covid-19 that they have jointly developed.
2. The device is a first-of-its-kind in the market that does clinically accurate continuous monitoring of four critical parameters Temperature, Oxygen Saturation, Respiratory Rate and Heart Rate.
3. The device has already reached over 2,000 patients in public and private hospitals, and at homes, with another 5,000 devices in the pipeline. Production is being scaled up to meet the growing demand. The cost of the device ranges from Rs. 2,500 to 10,000

depending on the configuration and parameters.

4. The device is completely self-contained, portable, wireless, and can be clipped on to the patient's finger and data is streamed to a mobile phone or central monitoring system. The temperature is measured at the armpit and blood oxygen level and other parameters at the finger itself. The device is reusable and has a lifetime of over a year. The devices can be used by the hospitals and doctors for patient management beyond Covid-19.
5. The core technology was validated by a year-long multi-centric study at various Chennai-based medical institutions for the accuracy and performance with reference to current standards. Specific to Covid, the reduction of close contact with patients by doctors and nurses, savings in PPE, and monitoring equipment was found to be a significant advantage by hospitals.

Link: <https://youtu.be/6sFzOKYgp0k>

08.08.2020

Vidyarthi Vigyan Manthan 2020-21:

1. **VVM** is an initiative of Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA), in collaboration with Vigyan Prasar, an autonomous organization under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), an institution under the Ministry of Education (earlier known as Ministry of Human Resources and Development).
2. VVM is a national program for popularizing science among school students of standard VI to XI, conceptualised to identify the bright minds with a scientific aptitude among the student community
3. Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan launched 'Vidyarthi Vigyan Manthan, 2020-21'. This initiative is a national programme for popularizing science among school students of Class 6th to 11th. It was designed to identify the bright minds with a scientific aptitude among the student community.
4. Objectives:

1. To create interest among students in pure science
2. To educate school children about India's contributions from tradition to modern, to the world of science and technology
3. To provide hands-on training to students through workshops and other events
4. To provide mentors for preparing students to carry forward their education in the field of science
5. To conduct competitive tests to identify students who have a scientific bent of mind
6. To identify successful students at the State and National levels and felicitate them
7. To organise exposure visits for the winners to various R&D institutions in the country

National Bone & Joint Day:

1. Bone and Joint day is celebrated all over India by the Indian Orthopaedic Association (IOA) and all its state chapters on 4th of August every year since 2012.
2. The primary aim is to create awareness among people about the bone health, various orthopaedic illnesses which can be prevented or treated and be useful to the society.
3. This year the theme of observing the day is 'Prevention of deformity in degenerative disease'.
4. Necessary steps to help to prevent having these deformities and improve the outcome of the treatment are:
 - a) Maintaining an ideal weight
 - b) Healthy diet Regular weight bearing exercise
 - c) Weight bearing exercises
 - d) Improve muscle strength
 - e) Yoga
 - f) Avoid overuse or misuse of the joint
 - g) Use of appropriate braces Avoid joint injuries

IIT Kanpur develops indigenous seed balls BEEG for farmers:

1. IIT Kanpur has developed indigenous seed balls named BEEG (Bio -compost Enriched Eco-friendly Globule) which will help people and farmers in plantation with safety in Corona times and will also provide employment to people.
2. The BEEG is developed in collaboration with Agnys Waste Management Private Limited (start-up at IIT Kanpur).
3. The Seed Balls are comprised of indigenous variety of seeds, compost, and clay.
4. There is no need for digging pits for planting saplings. These seed walls are to be thrown at aimed places and they will germinate when come into contact with water.
5. BEEG is enriched with the right ingredients and seeds to germinate early, and are the best way to utilise Monsoon and plant as many trees as possible without risking lives by social gathering during Covid 19.

NCPOR's study on Arctic Ice:

1. The National Centre of Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) has found a dramatic decline in the Arctic sea ice due to global warming.
2. The decline of sea ice has led to localized increase in evaporation, air humidity, cloud cover, and rainfall. Arctic sea ice is a sensitive indicator of climate change and has strong retaliatory effects on other components of the climate system.
3. In its observations, NCPOR has noted that the largest decline in Arctic sea ice in the past 41 years happened in July 2019. In the last 40 years (1979-2018), the sea ice has been declining at a rate of '-4.7%' per decade, while its rate was found to be '-13%' in July 2019. If this trend continues,

there would be no ice left in the Arctic sea by 2050, which would be dangerous for humanity and the entire environment.

4. With the help of satellite data collected from 1979 to 2019, NCPOR has tried to understand the rate of surface warming and the changes in global atmospheric circulation.
5. The study has also pointed out that the decrease of the Arctic sea ice area and the increase in the duration of summer and autumn seasons have affected the local weather and climate over the Arctic Ocean and its marginal seas.
6. Being a sensitive indicator of climate change, the loss of ice cover in the Arctic sea has had strong feedback effects on other components of the climate system such as prevention or reduction of heat and momentum, water vapour, and other material exchange between the atmosphere and the sea.
7. The worrying element to note is that the volume of ice formation during winters is unable to keep pace with the volume of ice loss during summers.
8. In the background of the global warming scenario, the study reveals that global ocean-atmospheric warming has enhanced the Arctic sea ice loss. The study demonstrated the application of satellite observations and model reanalysis data for the determination and validation; the 2019 sea-ice extent tied to the second lowest sea ice minimum record.
9. Although there are no extreme weather events recorded this year, an accelerated decline in sea-ice extent and sea-ice volume in summer 2019 was dominant, and also the northern hemisphere has experienced record high-temperature rise especially during the spring and summer months.

Link: <https://youtu.be/j-pBwL1K9G8>

5. Drinking Water: Quality & Challenges

Introduction:

Mumbai residents need not buy reverse osmosis (RO) water purifiers as a study by the Union

Consumer Affairs Ministry has found samples of tap water collected from the financial capital compliant with the Indian standards for drinking water.

However, other metro cities of Delhi, Kolkata and Chennai failed in almost 10 out of 11 quality parameters tested by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** which is under the aegis of the **Consumer Affairs Ministry**. Similarly, samples drawn from 17 other state capitals were not as per the prescribed specifications for drinking water. Releasing the second phase study, Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said, "Out of 20 state capitals, all the 10 samples of piped water drawn from Mumbai were found to comply with all 11 parameters, while other cities are failing in one or more." In the third phase, samples from the capital cities of northeastern states and from 100 smart cities will be tested and their results are expected by January 15, 2020.

The Water Quality Report for State Capitals and Delhi:

Department of Consumer Affairs decided to undertake a study through the **Bureau of India Standards (BIS)** on the quality of piped drinking water being supplied in the country and also rank the States, Smart Cities and even Districts based on the quality of tap water.

1. In Delhi, all the samples drawn from various places did not comply with the requirements of the Indian Standard & failed on several parameters.
2. All the 10 samples drawn from Mumbai were found to comply with the requirements.

Alarming facts:

1. More than 163 million Indians – higher than the population of Russia – do not have access to safe drinking water.
2. Irrespective of the source of water, in most parts of rural India, availability of water decreases dramatically in the summer months as the water levels drop and surface sources may dry up.
3. India's estimated **per capita availability of water in 2025 will be 1,341 cubic metre**. This may further fall to 1,140 cubic metre in 2050, bringing it closer to becoming water-scarce.

4. **NITI Aayog's Composite Water Management Index 2018**, India ranks 120 out of 122 countries.
5. India is ranked 13th among the 17 most water-stressed countries of the world.
6. According to the Ministry of Urban Development, 80% of India's surface water is polluted.

Sustainable Development Goal target 6.1 calls for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water. The target is tracked with the indicator of "safely managed drinking water services" – drinking water from an improved water source that is located on premises, available when needed, and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination.

Causes of this problem:

1. There is 'n' number of sources in the capital which affects water quality.
2. The basic **raw water is very poor** which is difficult to purify.
3. The **quality of water treatment** is not upto mark.
4. **Mixing** of surface water & ground water without proper testing.
5. **Pipeline** not maintained properly
6. It is seen that **Water supply line & sewerage line runs side by side**.
7. In the Name of water purification, water is only
8. Samples collected do not reflect the true water quality.
9. Water falls under the **state list** of the Constitution and participation of states is crucial to make the mission of providing clean drinking water a success.

Challenges:

1. Climate change, increasing water scarcity, population growth, demographic changes and urbanization already pose challenges for water supply systems.
2. By 2025, half of the world's population will be living **in water-stressed areas**.
3. Re-use of wastewater, to recover water, nutrients, or energy, is becoming an important strategy.

4. Increasingly countries are using wastewater for irrigation – in developing countries this represents 7% of irrigated land.
5. While this practice if done inappropriately poses health risks, safe management of wastewater can yield multiple benefits, including increased food production.
6. Options for water sources used for drinking water and irrigation will continue to evolve, with an increasing reliance on groundwater and alternative sources, including wastewater.
7. Climate change will lead to greater fluctuations in harvested rainwater.
8. Management of all water resources will need to be improved to ensure provision and quality.
9. **No binding to the BIS standard in India.**
10. The solid waste which is dumped around, toxic industrial waste, and sewage among other factors contribute to pollution of the groundwater.
11. The dissolved solids cannot be removed by chlorination.

Effects of the issue:

1. Contaminated water and poor sanitation are linked to transmission of diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhoid, and polio.
2. Reduction in **tourist inflow**.
3. Bottled water gives rise to plastic pollution due to its demand
4. RO water is totally deprived of essential minerals and salts which is necessary.

5. **Reverse osmosis** during water purification also results in **wastage of water**.

Solutions and Way forward:

1. This is the first time such a data is made public and attempt has been made to study drinking water at consumer level and we should do this very frequently.
2. Citizens should be **sensitized** about the issue.
3. The consumers, the service providers and the government should all be equally responsible of their responsibilities
4. Long-distance supply of water should be avoided.
5. **Compliance to Bureau of Indian Standards** for water quality should be made mandatory for local bodies.
6. **Data based decision** taking system.
7. Pipelines should be maintained properly.
8. **Rainwater harvesting** should be done.
9. Treatment plants have to be
10. We need to **manage underground reservoirs**.
11. **Sampling methodology** should be proper.
12. **Boiling of water** is good to just kill bacteria and is not effective towards dissolved solids and require additional chemical treatment.
13. Therefore, there has to be **a holistic approach** towards water supply and demand.

Link: <https://youtu.be/-bHVnAfZuA0>

6. Importance of Tiger Conservation

Introduction:

The awe-inspiring tiger is one of the most iconic animals on Earth. The tiger population across the world dropped sharply since the beginning of the 20th century but now for the first time in conservation history, their numbers are on the rise. In good news for India, Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar on Tuesday said the country has 70 percent of the world's tiger population. Global Tiger Day, also called the International Tiger Day, is an annual event marked to raise awareness for tiger

conservation. It is observed every year on July 29. It was started in 2010 at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit, with the aim to promote a global system for protecting the natural habitats of tigers and raise awareness among people on why tiger conservation must be supported.

Centrality of Tiger Agenda:

1. The centrality of tiger agenda is an ecological necessity for the sustainability of our environment.



2. An umbrella species, the tiger signifies the health of the ecosystem services which support life on the planet.
3. The carbon locked up in tiger forests provide a great adaptation to the threats of climate change.
4. The aesthetic, ethical and cultural values of tigers are the critical factors for saving tigers.
5. The presence of tigers in the forest is an indicator of the well being of the ecosystem.
6. They prevent over-grazing by limiting herbivore numbers and maintain ecological integrity.
7. Tigers attracting tourists, which provide incomes for local communities.

Threats:

- Habitat loss and poaching continue to pose a threat to the animal's
- Tiger parts are used in traditional Chinese medicines, tiger skin is used for decorative and medicinal purposes.
- Habitat degradation by human beings and other natural factors (such as fires and floods).
- The loss of habitat resulted in the reduction of their prey species.
- The Ken-Betwa River interlinking project would have greater impact on Panna Tiger Reserve.

India's Efforts:

- ❖ India has more than 70% of the world's wild tigers.
- ❖ India is in a leadership position on the tiger front globally.
- ❖ The Project Tiger, launched in 1973, has grown to more than 50 reserves amounting to almost 2.2% of the country's geographical area.
- ❖ A few months ago, the first successful inter-state translocation of a pair of tigers was carried out from tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh to Satkosia in Odisha.
- ❖ The 2018 All India Tiger Estimation is currently underway and is said to be the world's largest wildlife survey in terms of "coverage, intensity of sampling and quantum of camera trapping."

- ❖ The initiatives are many
 - Enabling provisions for tiger in the national legislation.
 - Creation of National Tiger Conservation Authority.
 - Stepping up allocation for the tiger.
 - Increase in Project Tiger coverage.
 - Modern protocol for field monitoring: Monitoring System for Tigers – Intensive Protection and Ecological Status (M-STrIPES).
 - Year-round monitoring of tiger and prey.
 - Bilateral pacts with neighbours.
 - Founder member of GTF and ongoing collaboration.
 - Online database of tiger crime.
 - Strict adherence to guidelines for responsible ecotourism in tiger reserves.

Reasons for Increase in Tiger Population:

- **There has been no organised poaching** by traditional gangs in Central Indian landscapes since 2013.
- Due to **increased vigilance and conservation efforts** by the Forest Department. Organised poaching rackets have been all but crushed
- The rehabilitation of villages outside core areas in many parts of the country has led to the availability of **more inviolate space for tigers**.
- The increased protection has encouraged the tiger to breed.
- The estimation exercises have become increasingly more accurate over the years. Wildlife officials used **mobile application M-STrIPES** (Monitoring System For Tigers- Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) to estimate the big cat population.
- The M-STrIPES, the application used by forest guards, is **GPS-enabled** and **helps to capture data** relating to tiger sightings, deaths, wildlife crime and ecological observations while patrolling

Conclusion:

- ❖ We have to create a healthy balance **between sustainability and development**.

- ❖ **Forest corridors** linking protected areas must be maintained where they exist.
- ❖ Existing habitats have to be surveyed and improved to provide food for the elephants
- ❖ **Local communities** need to be educated to have reduced stress levels in elephants during conflict mitigation, no fire, no firecracker and no mob crowds.
- ❖ There is a need for a **monitoring mechanism** which will record and disperse information on such conflicts
- ❖ Experts suggest the other way to reduce the man-animal conflict is to increase the population of wild ungulates, namely hares and the wild boars, both of which are prolific breeders, as a prey for wild

carnivores. Separate big enclosures can be made in the jungles to breed them. The excess stock can be released in the jungles at regular intervals for the wild carnivores to prey upon.

- ❖ In order to be truly effective, prevention of human-wildlife conflict has to involve the full scope of society: international organizations, governments, NGOs, communities, consumers and individuals. Solutions are possible, but often they also need to have financial backing for their support and development.

Link: <https://youtu.be/ck91LsuizJU>

7. World Elephant Day- Talking conflicts

Introduction:

More than 500 people and 100 elephants die every year due to conflict with each other, officials of the environment ministry. Releasing the figures at an event World Elephant Day on August 12, the officials said interactions between humans and elephants have led to the death of both. As per the last census conducted in 2017, India is home to 30,000 elephants. Addressing the event, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said elephant conservation is vital as it balances the ecosystem. Elephants have to be kept in forests for which fodder and water augmentation programme has been initiated, the minister said, adding that by next year results will start showing.

Reasons:

1. Depleting forest cover, encroachment in forested areas and the human settlements have come close to the forest areas.
2. Excess mining, dams construction and heavy traffic movement in forested area causes animal attacks on humans.
3. Construction in forested areas affects the habitat of elephants which cause man-animal conflict.
4. Depletion of the natural base, changing crop patterns, suitability of man modified habitats to wild animals, presence of stray dogs and cattle in forest fringe areas.

5. Lack of buffer zone between wildlife and human settlement.
6. Increased disturbance due to collection of fuel wood, fodder, water etc. from the forests has also increased the incidences of man-animal conflict.
7. It is observed that people have to go deeper and deeper, year by year for fetching firewood and other forest produce. This has increased the number of incidences of man-animal conflict.
8. Infestation of wildlife habitat by the invasive exotic weeds. As a result, herbivores come out of forest area and cause depredation of agricultural crops on the fringes.
9. Livestock grazing in forests leads to human-wildlife conflict. At the same time it is having disastrous impact on wild herbivore populations as they have to compete with livestock for their food source.

Conflict Prevention Strategies

Exclusionary Methods:

- 1) **Protected areas and ecological corridors**
 - a) Through the establishment of PAs and efforts of conservationists and wildlife managers, wildlife conservation has become synonymous with the physical separation of humans and wildlife.

Ecological corridors stitch together fragmented habitat and isolated PAs, facilitate connectivity between herds, offer demographic rescue effects, and enhance gene flow

- b) While ecological corridors are gaining popularity in Asia and Africa, development pressures and infrastructure expansion in or surrounding elephant ranges are commonly executed without concern for ecological impact, resulting in opposition to plans for, and needs of, corridor construction.
- c) Thus, a more robust understanding of human-driven land use change and a greater concern for its impacts on elephant habitat, connectivity, and migratory patterns needs to be considered.

2) Electric fences and trenches

- a) Physical exclusion methods such as electric fences and trenches are commonly used to deter elephants from entering farmland and human settlements.
- b) Long-term effectiveness may be further hindered by design, responses to reports of fence breaks and fence-breaking animals, and overall PA enforcement and management.
- c) Physical barriers also negatively affect long-term survival by further isolating already fragmented elephant populations, disrupting movement, and access to seasonal food and water resources, and impeding gene flow between herds.

Other Methods

Acoustic deterrents

1. Farmers guard crops and scare away crop-raiding elephants by yelling, setting off firecrackers or carbide cannons, hitting metal objects, and throwing stones.
2. These techniques are effective in keeping elephants away from crops but they disrupt psychosocial well-being and livelihood activities of farmers.
3. Audio playbacks of threatening sounds like wild cat growls, human shouts, and vocalizations from elephant matriarchal groups have only been tested as short-term and short-distance elephants repellents.

Light-based deterrents

- Farmers may light bonfires and use flaming torches or flashlights to guard ripening crops and deter raiding elephants.
- Solar spotlights, which are shone in elephants' eyes to drive them away from agricultural fields.

Agriculture-based deterrents

- In comparison to exclusion, acoustic, and light methods, agriculture-based deterrents like chili-grease covered fences and chili dung have had limited testing and use.

Early detection and warning

- Techniques for early detection and warning of elephants involve using mobile phones for quick communication among farmers, and between farmers and local officials, to facilitate cooperation in driving away potentially problematic elephants.

Conflict Mitigation Strategies

Domestication:

- Domestication practices have long served to remove or reduce human-elephant conflict pressures. Although elephants can breed in captivity, it is preferred to capture and train wild females
- Once captured and domesticated, elephants have integrated into human society serving in temples and at community festivities, transporting people and heavy loads for agriculture, warfare, and hunting, and helping to capture other wild elephants.
- The loss of these positive human-elephant connections in local communities and productive management of wild populations likely contributes to human-elephant conflict and the associated negativity toward species conservation

Culling

- Consistently problematic elephants, including those that have killed humans, are frequently culled to resolve resentments and prevent future clashes and losses in communities.
- Given the endangered and/or vulnerable status of elephants, as well as skewed sex ratio due to ivory poaching, culling potentially degrades the genetic health of remaining albeit fragmented elephant populations.

Translocation

- Translocation involves the drugging, immobilization, and transportation of problematic elephants from human settlements or farms to PAs for release.
- Moreover, translocation often undermines conservation goals because of increased elephant mortality during capture and transportation, and sometimes deliberate killing in the release area

Compensation

- More market-based strategies for mitigating human-elephant conflict provide financial compensation to those affected.

Conclusions:

- ❖ Human-elephant conflict remains a significant problem for many communities, threatens human lives, livelihoods, and local communities, and drives habitat degradation and elephant population declines.

- ❖ Current strategies to manage human-elephant conflict largely focus on either physical separation, or mitigating the problem by domesticating, translocating, or culling problematic elephants and/or compensating farmers.
- ❖ While these tools remain important conflict management strategies, the majority appear to be driven by short-term, site-specific factors that often transfer the problems of human-elephant conflict from one place to another. In this paper, we reviewed causes and consequences of human-elephant conflict, and current approaches to preventing and mitigating human-elephant conflict.
- ❖ The fragmentation of wildlife habitat should be avoided and proper care should be taken so that the connectivity through wildlife corridors is not disturbed.
- ❖ Wide reach of LPG connections to the villagers who frequently go to the forest areas to fetch fuel wood. CSR spending could be utilised here.
- ❖ Villagers and households in heavy risk areas should be educated on preventing and mitigating conflicts.
- ❖ Crops like sugarcane, Banana, Bajra, should not be allowed to be grown near forest areas.
- ❖ Developing risk maps by integrating geographic and landscape factors for better conflict management efforts.
- ❖ Developing regional level conservation policies as there were lot of reserve level differences and need for implementing locally relevant conservation strategies.

Link: <https://youtu.be/X9rndx96ViQ>

8. Tackling Human Trafficking

Introduction:

Last month, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warned the world that the Covid-19 pandemic would lead to a major increase in human trafficking. India's Home Ministry responded by issuing an advisory to its state governments earlier this month, with clear

instructions to set up or improve local anti-trafficking networks. The Ministry has written to states and Union territories to expedite the setting up of new anti-human trafficking units (AHTUs) and upgrade the infrastructure of existing ones to 'combat and prevent' human trafficking. The AHTUs are an integrated task force to prevent and combat the menace of human trafficking. Trained

representatives from the police, department of women and child development, other relevant departments and renowned non-government organisations are part of the unit which was first established in 2007. While the Central government has provided financial assistance for setting up physical infrastructure in these units, it is the responsibility of various states to depute suitable manpower to manage them

1. Human trafficking is the process of trapping people through the use of violence, deception or coercion and exploiting them for financial or personal gain.
2. What trafficking really means is girls groomed and forced into sexual exploitation; men tricked into accepting risky job offers and trapped in forced labour in building sites, farms or factories; and women recruited to work in private homes only to be trapped, exploited and abused behind closed doors with no way out.
3. People don't have to be transported across borders for trafficking to take place. In fact, transporting or moving the victim doesn't define trafficking – it can take place within a single country, or even within a single community.
4. People can be trafficked and exploited in many forms, including being forced into sexual exploitation, labour, begging, crime (such as growing cannabis or dealing drugs), domestic servitude, marriage or organ removal.

Scale and Magnitude:

1. People are trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, forced marriage; for selling children and as child soldiers, as well as for removal of organs;
2. Women make up 49% and girls 23% of all victims of trafficking;
3. Sexual exploitation is the most common form of exploitation (59% share) followed by forced labour (34% share);
4. Most victims are trafficked within their countries' borders – those trafficked abroad are moved to the richest countries.

5. 72% people exploited in the sex industry are women.
6. 43% of victims are trafficked domestically within national borders.

How do people get entangled in trafficking?

1. People trapped by traffickers are mostly trying to escape poverty or discrimination, improve their lives and support their families.
2. Vulnerable people are often forced to take unimaginable risks to try and escape poverty or persecution, accepting precarious job offers and making hazardous migration decisions, often borrowing money from their traffickers in advance.
3. When they arrive they find that the work does not exist, or conditions are completely different. They become trapped, reliant on their traffickers and extremely vulnerable. Their documents are often taken away and they are forced to work until their debt is paid off.

Constitutional & legislative provisions related to Trafficking in India:

1. Trafficking in Human Beings or Persons is **prohibited under the Constitution of India under Article 23 (1)**.
2. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) is the premier legislation for **prevention of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation**.
3. Criminal Law (amendment) Act 2013 has come into force wherein Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code has been substituted with Section 370 and 370A IPC which provide for **comprehensive measures to counter the menace of human trafficking** including trafficking of children for exploitation in any form including physical exploitation or any form of sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, or the forced removal of organs.
4. **Protection of Children from Sexual offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**, which has come into effect from 14th November, 2012 is a special law **to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation**.



5. It provides **precise definitions** for different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment.
6. There are **other specific legislations** enacted relating to trafficking in women and children Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994, apart from specific Sections in the IPC, e.g. Sections 372 and 373 dealing with selling and buying of girls for the purpose of prostitution.
7. State Governments have also **enacted specific legislations to deal with the issue**. (e.g. The Punjab Prevention of Human Smuggling Act, 2012).
- c) They are also trying routes through neighbouring countries including Nepal where collusion of officials with traffickers is suspected.
- d) Professional network chain of trafficking is such that victims are easily transported to the end use point quickly so it becomes difficult to locate them.
- e) The victims themselves will not make any hue and cry:
- f) Sometimes when they are trafficked by inducement and fraud (forced labour, slavery, in the name of love) victim is not aware that he/she is being trafficked till they reach the final point.

Way Forward and Conclusion:

Issues facing state institutions and Ngo's during rescuing operations of trafficking :

1. Evolving nature of trafficking is a challenge like uprise of technology usage, coward ways of conducting crimes this days and pressure to have money by poor.
2. Process of forming a centralised databank of children who were rescued to make monitoring easy is not very effective.
3. Maximum number of trafficked girls falls in the age bracket of 8-10 years according to rescue foundation so procuring details about the family and having a database of information is difficult.
4. It is found that there is a strong nexus between politicians and other powerful people in this field so public functionaries do not help the civil society organizations in time.
5. **Rescue operation is tough because:**
 - a) **Traffickers find new ways to smuggle girls like luring jobs by creating fake documents, multiple routes so it becomes tough to identify and rescue.**
 - b) Traffickers have been trying new ways, including transporting women on tourist visas to Gulf nations to get round Indian immigration checks.

- ✓ **Strengthening the capacity building:** To enhance the capacity building of law enforcement agencies and generate awareness among them, various **Training of Trainers (TOT) workshops** on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for Police officers and for Prosecutors at Regional level, State level and District level were held throughout the country.
- ✓ **Judicial Colloquium:** In order to train and sensitize the trial court judicial officers, Judicial Colloquium on human trafficking are held **at the High court level**.
- ✓ The **aim is to sensitize the judicial officers about the various issues concerning human trafficking and to ensure speedy court process.**
- ✓ Police should be **proactive in booking the cases** under trafficking provisions. Often cases are booked as kidnapping or missing person cases even though there is clear evidence of trafficking.
- ✓ **Increase investigations and prosecutions of officials allegedly complicit in trafficking**, and convict and punish those found guilty
- ✓ Improve central and state government implementation of protection programs and compensation schemes to ensure trafficking victims receive benefits, release certificates, and rehabilitation funds

- ✓ Develop and implement **standard operating procedures (SOPs) to harmonize victim identification and repatriation**, and the prosecution of suspected traffickers when trafficking crimes cross state lines

- ✓ Shelter homes need to be upgraded to protect children and provide necessary services to them.

Link: <https://youtu.be/Js5C1ulosuA>

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“Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value”

[Link: https://youtu.be/h1NIUmjtvll](https://youtu.be/h1NIUmjtvll)

“Life without liberty is like a body without spirit.”

[Link: https://youtu.be/l-39TSZMP4I](https://youtu.be/l-39TSZMP4I)

“Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

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