



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

JULY 2020

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INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

GENERAL STUDIES - I

1. How the pandemic strengthens patriarchy

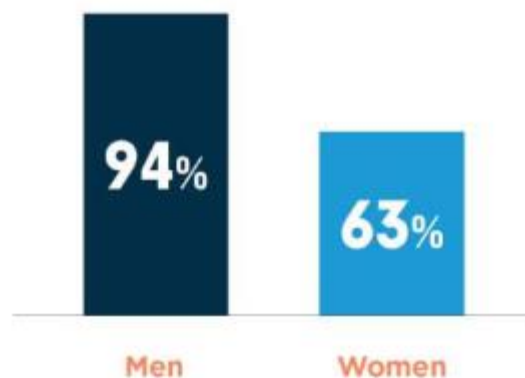
There will be aggravated impacts of COVID-19 for women already living on the economic margins

Women spend

3x

as many hours as men in **unpaid care and domestic work**, limiting their access to decent work.

More men between the ages of 25 to 54 are in the **labour force** than women:



The global **gender pay gap** is stuck at

16%

with **women paid up to 35% less than men** in some countries.



740
million women

globally work in the **informal economy**.

Globally,



65%
of women

had an **account at a financial institution** in 2017, compared to



72%
of men

Context:

- **Domestic maintenance work and care**, much of which are done **largely by women** within the confines of the home, have become the pillars of post-COVID life and coping strategies.
- Though central to the survival, well-being and flourishing of human beings, such work has historically been viewed with disdain.
- This is especially so in **patriarchal societies** like ours, in which they are **overtly belittled**, yet idealised and imposed as an **integral part of “womanhood”**.
- Never recognised, respected or rewarded, the household or society has cared the least for those who laboured long hours to provide care for others.

Women need to look over vulnerable sections in home as well as domestic works:

- The inherent vulnerability of children and the elderly to the coronavirus, prolonged and varying iterations of the lockdown, long closures of schools/colleges, the recent resumption of online classes and the option of work from home, inter alia, are all critically dependent on the sustained availability of long hours of care-work at home.
- Without it, much of the **coping measures** would become recalcitrant and challenging, given the paucity of alternate providers at present.
- The unfounded panic and the exclusionary norms by resident welfare associations against the external, needy care-workers, cloaked under the guise of precautions, deter people from availing the services even if available.
- All of this has **enhanced the centrality and value of care-work done by women** within the home.
- This **enhanced visibility and value** also imply a **deepened dependence** on and **inequality in care-work**.

On an average, Women and men working time in household activities:

1. Globally, women and girls perform 75 per cent of unpaid care and domestic work.
2. Though more than two decades old, the **national-level time-use survey** in 1998-99 revealed that women were responsible for **about 91 per cent of unpaid care and domestic maintenance work in India**.
3. **Women**, on average, spent **25 hours per week** in care work as opposed to about **two hours per week by men**. Estimates from a recent survey reinforce that women bear an unequal burden for unpaid care work.
4. Women spent more than five hours per day as against 45 minutes per day by men in unpaid care work and household maintenance in India in 2004-05.
5. What's more, the increase in women's care work tends to be accompanied by a consequent decline in the time available for them for leisure and personal care.
6. The increased worth and visibility of care work, thus, goes in tandem with a decline in women's immediate well-being.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Women:

1. The **year 2020**, marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, was intended to be **ground-breaking for gender equality**.
2. Instead, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back.
3. The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.
4. The measures pursued to offset the **impacts of the pandemic** also contribute to reinforcing this **regressive phenomenon**.

5. For instance, the **online education demands that mothers should be available** uninterruptedly for long hours to help the children familiarise with the nuances and demands of online classes, assignments and assessments.
6. Also, the onus of **protecting the children and elderly from possible coronavirus** infections and caring for home-quarantined members who are exposed to the virus falls heavily on women.
7. The **intensity of care work** goes up substantially if male members of the household are provided with the option of working from home.
8. By demanding **disproportionate time and energy of women** for care and domestic work, the pandemic has compelled them to confine themselves to their homes more than ever.

Contraction of women employment opportunities in various sectors:

- The increased dependence on women to perform this burgeoning work has a long-term consequence as well.
- It has the potential to **reverse the progress made by women** due to their decades of **unrelenting struggle** for economic empowerment and “to get out of the house”.
- Some of the sectors which are hard-hit by COVID are the ones which employ women in large numbers, such as tourism, hospitality and retail.
- It is almost certain that these sectors are not going to resume their operations at a full scale any time soon.
- This implies **substantial lay-offs of women workers** and a contraction of women’s opportunities to have an **independent source of income**.

To achieve better side of Gender Equality, the policy brief emphasizes three cross-cutting priorities:

Ensure Women’s Equal Representation In All Covid-19 Response Planning And Decision-Making:

1. Evidence across sectors, including economic planning and emergency response, demonstrates unquestioningly that policies that do not consult women or include them in decision-making are simply less effective, and can even do harm.
2. Beyond individual women, women’s organizations who are often on the front line of response in communities should also be represented and supported.

Drive Transformative Change For Equality By Addressing The Care Economy, Paid And Unpaid:

1. In the formal economy care jobs, from teachers to nurses, are underpaid in relation to other sectors. In the home, women perform the bulk of care work, unpaid and invisible.
2. Both are foundational to daily life and the economy but are premised on and entrench gendered norms and inequalities.

Target Women And Girls In All Efforts to Address The Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19:

1. It will be important to apply an intentional gender lens to the design of fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance programmes **to achieve greater equality, opportunities, and social protection**.
2. These **three cross-cutting priorities** reflect the UN Secretary-General’s recent Call to Action on Human Rights, which singled out measures that, if pursued, would have meaningful impact on the rights of women and girls.
3. These measures have become more vital in the context of the pandemic.

Conclusion:

- Pandemics create unforeseen disruptions and challenges and force us to resort to strategies or measures to offset their impacts which may **create dependencies and disparities**.

- However, such dependencies and disparities neither evolve naturally nor in a vacuum. They build on and exacerbate the **prevalent hierarchies and inequalities**.
- Intensive demand on care and domestic work by women during the present pandemic takes advantage of the patriarchal structure, which **relegates care work largely to women in India**.
- In multiple ways, COVID-19 has contributed to **lowering women's well-being and freedom**, and to the regressive phenomenon of the housewife.

2. Rebuild cities as spaces of dignity



Context:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has **unravelling deep inequalities** in how **basic services** are **accessed in urban India**.
- **Preventive methods** in combating the infection, at an individual level, have highlighted these disparities even more sharply.

Availability of Basic Services is very limited to some sections:

1. In the case of access to water, the recent **“Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition” (2018) survey** by the government found that there continue to be **glaring gaps in water access in urban and rural India**.
2. Consider, for example, the **limited access to water**. Washing hands for a minimum of 20 seconds is a fundamental in avoiding the infection.
3. However, for migrant labourers without proper dwelling units, this **“home-based” precaution** is a **limiting exercise** because of **inequitable access to water**.

4. The largely informal nature of contract employment under which migrant labourers work exacerbated the crisis during the various phases of the national lockdown.
5. With basic amenities lacking and means of livelihood shrinking, migrant labourers were forced to exit from cities. Thousands of them walked on foot to their villages some as far as 500 kilometres away at times, with tragic consequences.
6. The **institutional failings to provide access to basic infrastructure** can be seen more clearly in hindsight.
7. However, even this survey does **not count migrant workers**. For example, “floating populations” a term used to categorise “persons without any normal residence” in the respective state, such as migrant workers are not considered in the sample data.

Huge Gap in Data About Migrants:

1. Though the **Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008** laid down the process of registration it specified the role of urban local bodies in cities **to register migrants** and disseminate information regarding schemes and benefits and asked these bodies **to disburse “smart cards” for identification** it is apparent that these measures were not obligatory.
2. This was evident from the gap in the data provided by the union labour ministry and various state governments, in the wake of the pandemic, to the Supreme Court on the number of migrants.
3. Offline and online modes have equally failed in gathering this data. Surveys assess access mostly at a household level to provide **more “reliable” estimates**.
4. The **2018 survey**, for example, said that **in-house piped water supply** is the most used form of access in urban India, thereby ignoring how thousands of people get their water supply.
5. It offered **no clues** as to **how migrants accessed water**. There seems to be three possible options on how migrants may have got their water supply.
6. First, **migrant labourers** are likely to have **relied more on public amenities** such as hand pumps and public taps or standpipes which are connected to a municipal connection.
7. These sources are generally unreliable hand pumps and municipal pipes, for example, do not always supply water of potable quality.
8. Second, contractors employing migrant workers may provide them with water access. However, this is purely a **voluntary practise**.
9. **Urban water boards** do have a role in providing water to migrants. However, their responsibility towards providing a **minimum per capita daily amount** is, by and large, geared towards people who are connected to piped water supplies.

The problem is even deeper. There is a **huge gap in data about migrants**.

We do not know how many migrants enter and leave our states and cities.

New Framework of Comprehensive policy is the need of the hour:

1. The post pandemic world calls for a **new framework of access**. As long as migrants **remain “invisible”** to the state, they will be subject to work in an unsafe work environment. In our current context, this is an impending disaster.
2. **Recognition and identification of migrants** is the first step towards a more enhanced framework to provide basic amenities. To begin with, an effort to create a **database of migrant workers** is most necessary.
3. To begin with, a **record of migrant workers entering and leaving every city and state is an elementary requirement**.
4. This could be a game-changer by **creating a digital Pan-India database** to ensure coordination with their home districts and respective states.
5. Eventually, convergence around this could create a **framework of health, banking, microfinance and insurance networks** centred around workers and migrants in urban areas.
6. **Risky work conditions** could lead to the **resurgence of the virus**, unless labourers can take **adequate safety precautions** at their workplace.

Conclusion:

- The crisis presents an opportunity to **re-examine how our cities are developed on the backs of migrant labour**.
- Along with the responsibility of the state, businesses and contractors employing labourers can be involved in providing access to basic services.
- The deployment of such measures could be made a requirement for building permits and clearances violations could attract penalties.
- The **Unorganised Workers Social Security Act** hardly puts any responsibility on the contractors and businesses to provide any services.
- It came as no surprise when most of them neglected the migrant workers during the crisis.
- A greater role for businesses is not being idealistic. Rather, such roles are recognised as crucial by the International Labour Organisation.
- Such measures give central importance to the dignity of labour, they also affirm the dignity of an individual “before” their labour.
- It may go a **long way in building our cities** as spaces where access to basic services by the poor is **rooted in a language of dignity and rights, not charity and voluntarism**.

GENERAL STUDIES - II

1. In the name of ‘Cooperative Federalism’

Introduction:

- Federation is an agreement between two types of governments sharing power and controlling their respective spheres.
- Thus, a federation is a **system of national and local governments**, combined under a **common sovereignty** with both national as well as federating units having autonomous spheres assigned to them by the constitution.
- India opted for **quasi-federal structure after independence**.
- The term “federal” has not been mentioned in the constitution but the working of Indian democracy is essentially federal in structure.
- However, it is the practical working style of federalism, which brought the concept of cooperative federalism and competitive federalism in India.

Finance Commission role in devolution of funds:

- Finance Commission has to play an important role in **achieving the delicate balance** in the conflicting domain of finance by addressing the concerns of both the players.
- Any attempt to shift the uneasy balance in favour of the Centre will strengthen the argument that this government’s talk of **cooperative federalism** serves as a useful mask to **hide its centralising tendencies**.
- As a neutral arbiter of Centre-state relations, the Finance Commission should seek to maintain the delicate balance in deciding on contesting claims.
- This may well require giveaways especially if states are to be incentivised to push through legislation on items on the state and concurrent list.

- The fiscal stress at various levels of the government necessitates a realistic assessment of the **country's macro-economic situation**, the preparation of a **medium-term roadmap**, as well as careful calibration of the framework that governs Centre-state relations.
- At this critical juncture, the Finance Commission should present the broad contours of the roadmap.
- Though it could request for another year's extension to present its full five-year report citing the prevailing uncertainty.

Delayed payments and consistently below 14th FC recommendations:

1. The **14th Finance Commission report** was accepted in 2015 with the promise that it would **devolve more finances to the States**.
2. As part of the process, States would have **new responsibilities**, especially in the **social sector**.
3. Two years later, the introduction of the **Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime** was also justified as a **grand bargain** that would eventually leave all States better off.
4. In reality, **tax devolution to States** has been consistently below 14th Finance Commission projections.
5. One reason for this has been the **economic slowdown**, caused primarily by the Central government, and **lower-than-expected GST collections**.
6. The shortfall in GST collection for 2018-2019 was 22% when compared to projections. Payments have been delayed as well.
7. For example, Centre owed States about Rs.35,000 crore as GST compensation for December 2019 and January 2020, which was only paid in June 2020 after a delay of more than five months.

Huge gap between FC recommendations and Actual Transfers:

1. The COVID-19 situation has deepened the crisis. According to a **State Bank of India report**, the collective loss to GSDP due to the pandemic is ₹30.3 lakh crore or **5% of GSDP**.
2. **States are being required to spend more** to help common citizens and save livelihoods.
3. The Centre is providing almost negligible support. In West Bengal, as of June 30, the State government had spent ₹1,200 crore in fighting COVID-19.
4. The Centre has given ₹400 crore under the National Health Mission and to the State Disaster Response Mitigation Fund, but *absolutely nothing specifically for the pandemic*.
5. The **Centre has imposed a series of cesses**, which are not part of the divisible pool and **not shared with the States**.
6. There are now rumours of a **COVID-19 cess** as well. According to a study by the **Centre for Policy Research**, there is a ₹6.84 lakh crore gap between what the 14th Finance Commission promised to States and what they have received.
7. And while this has happened, the **nature of public spending in India** has undergone a massive shift.
8. In 2014-2015, States undertook programmes and projects spending 46% more than the Central Government; today the figure is 64%.
9. Despite this, the Centre's fiscal deficit exceeds the consolidated State deficit by 14%! India is paying for a profligate Centre.

Need to revisit the FRBM provisions:

In theory, the Centre has **raised the fiscal deficit limit for States**, under the FRBM, **from 3% to 5%**.

But **only 0.5% of this rise is unconditional**. The remaining **1.5%** is dependent on fulfilling certain unrealistic and impractical measures — including privatisation of power distribution, and enhancing revenues of urban local bodies.

1. Due to pandemic, the **fiscal deficit for States**, collectively, is inevitably going to breach the **projection of 2.04%**.
2. As per provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, the GSDP can actually accommodate a fiscal deficit of 3%.

3. Now, post-pandemic, this limit will be crossed. The **FRBM has an “escape clause”** that allows for a one-time relaxation of the fiscal deficit threshold up to 0.5% in a time of exigency.
4. The escape clause has been **utilised by the Centre** but it has proven woefully insufficient in addressing the current crisis.
5. **Fiscal policymakers and technocrats** agree that the rigidity of the FRBM has to be revisited.
6. It should allow for **greater flexibility and consultation** as to when and how the “escape clause” can be applied.
7. The Centre has gone in for **subjective interpretation**, imposing conditions that are outside the scope of the FRBM.

Conclusion:

- Cooperative and competitive federalism are **not mutually exclusive**. They have the **same basic principle underlying** i.e. development of the nation as a whole.
- Cooperative and competitive federalism may be two sides of the same coin as the competition **alone cannot give the best results**, it is competition with cooperation that will drive the real change.
- Centre government needs to be **more considerate of the financial woes** of the State and try to deliver on the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission report.
- The government should stress on the **need to leverage the potential of cooperative and competitive federalism** for achieving **all round inclusive development in India**.

2. A motorcycle and the art of court management

* MEANING& DEFINITION OF CONTEMPT OF COURT AS PER INDIAN LAW

1. CONTEMPT OF COURT - POSITION UNDER INDIAN CONSTITUTION –

- **1.ARTICLE,129 : Supreme Court to be a court of record -**
The Supreme Court shall be a court of record and shall have all the powers of such a court including the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- **2.ARTICLE ,215: High Courts to be courts of record -** Every High Court shall be a court of record and shall have all the powers of such a court including the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- **3. ARTICLE .144 :Civil and judicial authorities to act in aid of the Supreme Court -** All authorities, civil and judicial, in the territory of India shall act in aid of the Supreme Court.
- **4. ARTICLE.141 Law declared by Supreme Court to be binding on all courts -** The law declared by the Supreme Court shall be binding on all courts within the territory of India.

Context:

- Supreme Court chose to take umbrage to the tweets “brought the administration of justice in disrepute and are capable of undermining the dignity and authority of the institution and the office of the Chief Justice of India in particular”.
- Its response to these tweets was to **initiate suo motu proceedings for criminal contempt against the author of those tweets**, the lawyer and social activist, Prashant Bhushan.
- SC initiated the proceedings for **criminal contempt of court** against lawyer-activist Prashant Bhushan for his tweet criticising the current Chief Justice of India and the role of some Chief Justices of India in the last six years.

What does contempt of court means:

- **The Contempt of Courts Act of 1971** is one of the most powerful statutes in the country.
- It gives the constitutional courts wide powers to restrict an individual’s fundamental right to personal liberty for “scandalising the court” or for “wilful disobedience” of any judgment, writ, direction or order.
- The contempt of court law is one of the **most controversial elements** in the Indian legal context.
- While the basic idea of a contempt law is to **punish those** who do **not respect the orders of the courts**, in the Indian context, contempt is also used to punish speech that lowers the dignity of the court and interferes with the administration of justice.

Contempt of court can be of two kinds:

- Civil, that is the **wilful disobedience of a court order or judgment** or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court.
- Criminal, that is **written or spoken words or any act** that scandalises the court or lowers its authority or prejudices or interferes with the due course of a judicial proceeding or interferes/obstructs the administration of justice.

Definition of criminal contempt in India is extremely wide:

- The **objective for contempt** is stated to be **to safeguard the interests of the public**, if the authority of the Court is denigrated and public confidence in the administration of justice is weakened or eroded.
- But the definition of criminal contempt in India is **extremely wide**, and can be easily invoked.
- Suo motu powers of the Court to initiate such proceedings only serve to complicate matters.
- And **truth and good faith were not recognised as valid defences** until 2006, when the Contempt of Courts Act was amended.
- Nevertheless, the Delhi High Court, despite truth and good faith raised as defences, proceeded to sentence the employees of Mid-Day for contempt of court for portraying a retired Chief Justice of India in an unfavourable light.

Punishment for Contempt of Court:

- The Supreme Court and High Courts have the power to punish for contempt of court, either with simple imprisonment for a term up to six months or with fine up to Rs. 2,000 or with both.
- In 1991, the Supreme Court ruled that it has the power to punish for contempt not only of itself but also of high courts, subordinate courts and tribunals functioning in the entire country.
- On the other hand, High Courts have been given special powers to punish contempt of subordinate courts, as per Section 10 of the Contempt of Courts Act of 1971.

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 129:** Grants Supreme Court the power to punish for contempt of itself. Article 215: Grants every High Court the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- **Article 142(2):** Enables the Supreme Court to investigate and punish any person for its contempt.
- However, the **expression 'contempt of court' has not been defined by the Constitution.**

Contempt Law conflicting with Constitution provided law:

- **Article 19(1)(a)** of the Constitution gives the right to freedom of speech and expression to all citizens, while "contempt provisions" curb people's freedom to speak against the court's functioning.
- The law is very subjective which might be used by the judiciary arbitrarily to suppress their criticism by the public.

Conclusion:

- Besides needing to **revisit the need for a law on criminal contempt**, even the test for contempt needs to be evaluated.
- Unfortunately, in a system in which judges are not expected to disclose the reason for recusing themselves, and even charges of sexual harassment are not credibly investigated, it is only the fear of scandalising the judiciary that restrains much of the media and the public from a more rigorous examination of the functioning of the judiciary.
- If such a test ought to exist at all, it should be whether the contemptuous remarks in question actually obstruct the Court from functioning.
- It should not be allowed to be used as a means to prevent any and all criticism of an institution.
- In contemporary times, it is more important that courts are seen to be concerned about **accountability**, that allegations are scotched by impartial probes rather than threats of contempt action, and processes are transparent.

3. For equal treatment: On upholding rights of the disabled

Context:

- In holding that people **suffering from disability** are entitled to the **same benefits and relaxations** as candidates belonging to the **Scheduled Castes**, the Supreme Court has recognised the **travails of the disabled in accessing education or employment**, regardless of their social status.
- Even though drawn from all sections of society, those suffering from the several categories of disability recognised by law have always been an **under-privileged and under-represented section**, a fact noticed in official studies in the past.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in December 2006 and it came into force on in May 2008.
- The convention seeks to engage member countries in developing and carrying out policies, laws and administrative measures for securing the rights recognized in the Convention and abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination.
- It requires countries to **identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers** and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies.

WHO Disability Statistics



1 in 10 people in the world are disabled.



1 in 5 of the world's poor are disabled.



4 out of 5 Children with disabilities in Africa do not attend school.



More than **4 out of 5** disabled people in low and middle income countries, do not have access to assistive devices and technology that they need.



1 in 2 disabled people cannot afford healthcare, compared to 1 in 3 non-disabled people.

Less than **2 in 4** disabled people are employed, compared to **3 in 4** non-disabled people in OECD* Countries.

* 34 countries that make up the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development



Constitutional Frameworks for Differently abled in India:

- **Article 41 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)** states that State shall make effective provision for securing right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, within the limits of its economic capacity and development.
- The subject of 'relief of the disabled and unemployable' is specified in state list of the **Seventh Schedule of the constitution**.

Delhi High Court already given judgement of equal status in 2012:

1. Recently, the top court ruled that the Delhi High Court had correctly decided in 2012 that "people suffering from disabilities are also **socially backward**, and are therefore, at the **very least, entitled to the same benefits** as given to the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes candidates".
2. Therefore, it took the view that when SC/ST candidates get a relaxation of a certain percentage of marks to qualify for admission, the **same relaxation shall apply to disabled candidates too**.
3. In the 2012 case before the High Court, a university had allowed a 10% concession in the minimum eligibility requirement for SC/ST candidates, and 5% concession for disabled applicants.
4. The High Court ruled against this **differential treatment, terming it discriminatory**.

5. The larger principle behind this was that without imparting proper education to those **suffering from disabilities**, “there **cannot be any meaningful enforcement of their rights**” both under the Constitution and the then prevailing 1995 legislation on **providing equal opportunities** to the disabled and protecting their rights.
6. It can only be more applicable, now that a fresh law that aims for a greater transformative effect, the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, is in place.

Recent Legislation: Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016:

It becomes the duty of the Union, states as well as Union Territories to take up the matter.

It is also important to ensure that all government buses are disabled friendly in accordance with the harmonized guidelines.

1. Disability has been defined based on an **evolving and dynamic concept**.
2. The types of disabilities have been **increased from 7 to 21**. The act added mental illness, autism, spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological conditions, speech and language disability, thalassemia, hemophilia, sickle cell disease, multiple disabilities including deaf blindness, acid attack victims and Parkinson’s disease which were largely ignored in earlier act. In addition, the Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.
3. It increases the **quantum of reservation** for people suffering from disabilities **from 3% to 4% in government jobs and from 3% to 5% in higher education institutes**.
4. Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the **right to free education**.
5. Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to **provide inclusive education**.
6. Stress has been given to **ensure accessibility in public buildings** in a prescribed time frame along with Accessible India Campaign.
7. The Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and the State Commissioners will act as regulatory bodies and Grievance Redressal agencies, monitoring implementation of the Act.
8. A separate **National and State Fund** be created to provide financial support to the persons with disabilities.

Critics view regarding making equal treatment between differently abled and SC/ST's:

1. A counterpoint to the idea of eliminating the distinction between the disabled and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes may arise from those questioning the attempt to **equate physical or mental disability** with the **social disability** and experience of untouchability suffered by marginalised sections for centuries.
2. For instance, the social background of disabled persons from a traditionally privileged community may gave them an advantage over those suffering from historical social disability.
3. However, this may not always be the case. The Delhi High Court had cited the **abysmally low literacy and employment rates among persons with disabilities**.
4. Educational indicators captured in the **2001 Census** showed that **illiteracy among the disabled was much higher** than the general population figure.
5. The share of disabled children out of school was quite higher than other major social categories.
6. The 2001 Census put the **illiteracy rate among the disabled at 51%**. There was similar evidence of their **inadequate representation in employment too**.

Programmes/initiatives for Disabled in India:

Accessible India Campaign: Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs:

1. A nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.

2. The campaign targets at enhancing the accessibility of built environment, transport system and Information & communication ecosystem.

DeenDayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme: Under the scheme financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing various services to Persons with Disabilities, like special schools, vocational training centres, community-based rehabilitation, pre-school and early intervention etc

Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase / fitting of Aids and Appliances (ADIP): The Scheme aims at helping the disabled persons by bringing suitable, durable, scientifically-manufactured, modern, standard aids and appliances within their reach.

1. National Fellowship for Students with Disabilities (RGMF)
2. The scheme aims to increase opportunities to students with disabilities for pursuing higher education.
3. Under the Scheme, 200 Fellowships per year are granted to students with disability.
4. Schemes of the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities.

Conclusion:

- Many think that persons selected under reserved categories, especially under the differently abled category, are **not meritorious candidates** and their selection brings down the quality of institutions in which they are selected.
- If this mindset prevails, we must expect the systemic violation of disability reservation to continue.
- The 2016 law sought to address this by **raising the quota** for the **disabled from 3% to 5%** and envisaging incentives for the private sector to hire them too.
- It is vital that this is fully given effect to so that this significant segment of the population is not left out of social and economic advancement.

4. Community canteens 2.0

Context:

- In his recent address to the nation, PM Narendra Modi announced a **three-month extension** to the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana**.
- The government would provide 5 kg of grains and 1 kg of chickpea monthly to about **800 million beneficiaries** across the country.
- Alongside, he highlighted the implementation of the '**One Nation, One Ration**' (**ONOR**) scheme to improve access to subsidised grains for migrant workers.
- Lack of access to food drove millions of them to their native villages during the lockdown period.

However, constraints to migrant workers:

- While these measures are welcome, they may **fall short of reaching all sections of this vulnerable population**.
- As per the **Economic Survey (2018-19)**, India needs to take big initiatives to improve its food security as it faces supply constraints, water scarcity, small landholdings, low per capita GDP and inadequate irrigation.
- Most migrant workers do **not live with families**; many do **not cook their meals**. Instead, a significant number rely on roadside vendors and dhabas.

- Without access to cooking arrangement or fuel, only subsidised grains are not a sufficient solution to ensure nourishment.
- Neither would it be sufficient to attract them back to the urban areas as access to affordable food remains a major concern.
- Institutions such as the State Food Commissions have not made a big difference either.
- Distributing nutritious food as a **public health measure** is still not a political imperative, while ill-conceived policies are making it difficult for many to do this.
- The report on nutritional deficiency should **serve as an opportunity to evaluate the role played by the PDS** in bringing about dietary diversity for those relying on subsidised food.
- A critical aspect of nutrient adequacy is “diet diversity”, calculated by different groupings of foods consumed with the reference period ranging from one to 15 days.

Instead, is there a way to **ensure safe, nutritious and affordable food for all urban poor**, while saving fiscal resources, creating jobs, and furthering sustainability goals?

Solution to problems of urban Nutritional security: Community Canteens:

- A new report, ‘**Food and Nutrition Security Analysis, India, 2019**’, prepared by the **Government of India and the United Nations World Food Programme**, paints a picture of hunger and malnutrition amongst children in large pockets of India.
- The solution lies in tweaking an existing approach community canteens. More than 10 States have run community canteens.
- Some notable examples include the Amma Canteens in Tamil Nadu and Indira Canteens in Karnataka.

Drawback of sustenance of community canteens need to be addressed:

The customers of the community kitchens, who are central to such food security intervention schemes, don’t really have a say as far as the **quality and quantity of food served** to them are concerned.

Whether it is the regular customers or occasional ones, all are at the mercy of the centre coordinators and their goodness.

They felt suffocated in the tiny gloomy stinking rooms of the Dal Bhat canteens or in congested smelly makeshift spaces right in the middle of busy marketplaces and had to force ourselves to eat the canteen food.

1. However, a **drawback** is that most of these canteens **rely on continuous government support** for their sustenance as meals are usually priced unsustainably low at ₹5-10 per plate.
2. However, our preliminary analysis suggests that such canteens could be operationally self-sustainable by pricing the nutritious meals at ₹15-20 per plate.
3. This would still be lower than what most dhabas and roadside vendors charge for a meal.
4. While the Central government should extend the **initial capital support**, the implementation at the State level should be **led by urban local bodies or municipal corporations**, in collaboration with private entities as service providers.
5. Experts analysis suggests that with an initial social investment of ₹26,500 crore towards 60,000 canteens and about 8,200 kitchens, we could serve three nourishing meals a day to the **30 million urban poor workers, primarily migrants**.
6. If all urban migrant workers rely on community canteens instead of ONOR, the investment pays back itself in less than six years, as it helps avoid the potential food subsidy outlay due to ONOR, leading to annual savings of about ₹4,500 crore thereafter.

With Farmers nexus: Nutritious and environmentally sustainable food can be provided:

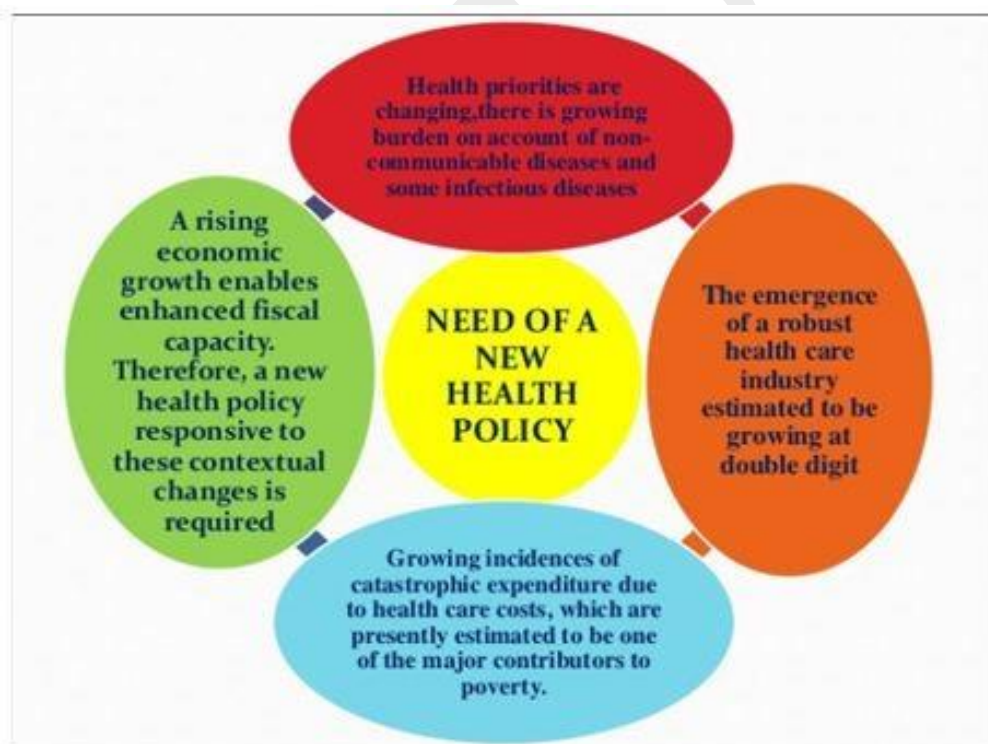
1. Community canteens could also **contribute to jobs, growth and sustainability**.

2. The 60,000 canteens, each serving about 500 beneficiaries on average, would generate more than 1.2 million jobs to serve 90 million meals a day.
3. These canteens would also **help bridge the nourishment gap among poor urban workers**. Further, the government should leverage community canteens to shift diets and agriculture production towards more sustainable and sustainably harvested food crops.
4. These canteens must incorporate **low-cost yet nutritious and environmentally sustainable food items** in the plate bringing in **coarse grains** such as millets and sorghum into the dietary patterns.
5. These canteens would **create the demand signals for the farmers** to diversify their crops and focus on **sustainably harvested produce**.

Conclusion:

- Under extreme circumstances, the **lack of access to food is a matter of survival**.
- But even in regular times, **access to nutritious food is essential**. Pandemic or not, access to affordable and safe food should not be an uncertainty for any section of the society.
- A **renewed approach to community canteens** would not only achieve **nutritional security** for migrant workers but would also create **new jobs**, save **fiscal resources**, support economic growth and promote sustainable diets and agriculture.

5. Before the next health crisis



Two dangers in the time of COVID-19:

- Stalling the efforts of the government and the private sector to revive the economy in the time of COVID-19 are **two dangers to people's health air pollution and greenhouse gases and a weak public health system**.
- The respite from the air pollution that blankets Indian cities is transitory. India must heed scientists' warnings tying health disasters to air pollution as well as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions causing global warming.

A noxious cocktail: Links between Pollution levels and COVID death rates:

- Strikingly, the avoided number of early deaths from dirty air quality in recent months in China is estimated to have exceeded the number of those who have died from COVID-19.
- In Europe, 11,000 air-pollution related deaths were estimated to have been averted since the start of lockdowns.
- There is an **association between** pollution levels in cities (despite the improvements during the pandemic) and COVID-19 infections and death rates, a link observed in New York City and the northern provinces of Italy.
- Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu, in the top tier of pollution concentration, have also seen high deaths and infections per thousand people.
- Of course, other factors too decide **morbidity and mortality**.
- COVID-19's toll has differed considerably across States Kerala and Tamil Nadu, for example, have a **lower COVID-19 mortality rate**. These States stand out with **good healthcare systems**.

Link between global warming and the emergence of diseases:

1. Globally some **9 million premature deaths** a year are associated with air pollutants, such as fine particulate matter, known as PM 2.5.
2. Regrettably, 14 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are in India. The air in Ghaziabad, Delhi, and Noida is particularly hazardous.
3. Last year, a **public health emergency** was declared as post-Diwali New Delhi's air quality index approached 500, the "severe plus emergency" category.
4. Adding to this noxious cocktail are GHGs like carbon dioxide, causing global warming and damaging health.
5. Despite the plunge during the lockdown, **atmospheric carbon emissions** are a record high because of past accumulation.
6. Ranked as the world's fifth most vulnerable country to climate change, India must respond to alerts on communicable diseases linked to GHGs.
7. Global warming intensifies heat waves and worsens respiratory illnesses. Locust swarms in Jaipur and Gurugram have been linked to climate change.
8. Evidence is also emerging on a link between **global warming and the emergence of diseases**.
9. Mosquito-borne diseases in India have been connected to global warming through both increased rainfall and heat waves. Europe reported its first local transmissions of dengue in 2010.

India's Public Healthcare System:

- The public healthcare system is made up of **secondary and tertiary care institutions** in key cities and provides basic healthcare facilities in the form of Primary Healthcare Centres in rural areas.
- The private sector provides the majority of secondary, tertiary, quaternary care institutions with a major concentration in metros, Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.
- India's healthcare industry is one of the fastest growing sectors and is expected to reach 280 billion by the year 2020.
- India is also one of the **leading destinations for high end diagnostics services** with tremendous capital investment for advanced diagnostic facilities.
- When it comes to world rankings, India was ranked 145th among 195 countries on Healthcare Access and Quality (HAQ) index in 2016.
- The index is based on 32 causes of death considered preventable with effective medical care.

- The **comprehensive index released by Global Burden of Disease**, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation says that despite such low rankings, India has seen improvement in HAQ since the year 1990. India's HAQ score 41.2 has improved from 24.7 score in the year 1990.
- India lags way behind its BRICS peers Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa on the HAQ index.

Need of the hour: Inclusive Agenda for Health:

In order to **ensure health services** with special attention to the **needs of marginalised sections** of the population the following will be emphasised:

1. **Access to services:** Barriers to access would be recognised and overcome especially for the disadvantaged and people located far from facilities.
2. Medical and public health facilities would be accessible to the differently-abled. They would be gender sensitive and child friendly.
3. **Special services:** Special services should be made available for the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.
4. For example, counselling of victims of mental trauma in areas of conflict.
5. **Monitoring and evaluation systems:** Routine monitoring and concurrent impact evaluations should collect disaggregated information on disadvantaged segments of the population.
6. **Representation in community fora:** Wherever community-level fora exist or are being planned for, such as Rogi Kalyan Samitis, VHSNC, representation of the marginalised should be mandatory.
7. Also, every Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee would strive to have 50 per cent representation of women.
8. **Training:** Training of health and rehabilitation professionals should incorporate knowledge of disability rights, as also the skills to deal with differences in perspectives and expectations between members of disadvantaged segments and the general population that may arise out of different experiences.

Need for a new plan on reducing Air Pollution and GHGs:

- India must not scramble to return to bad old ways of boosting **short-term growth** at any cost but **capitalise on the tantalising glimpse of a healthier and cleaner world**.
- Spending on **reducing air pollution and GHGs** provides estimated **health benefits of 1.4 to 2.5 times more than the cost of the actions**.
- **Delhi**, set to overtake Tokyo as the **most populous city by 2030**, needs to deal with transport, responsible for **two-fifth of the PM 2.5 in the skies**.
- Reforms should encourage **public transportation in place of the 10 million vehicles**, expand electric vehicles, and provide inter-connectivity between the metro and buses.

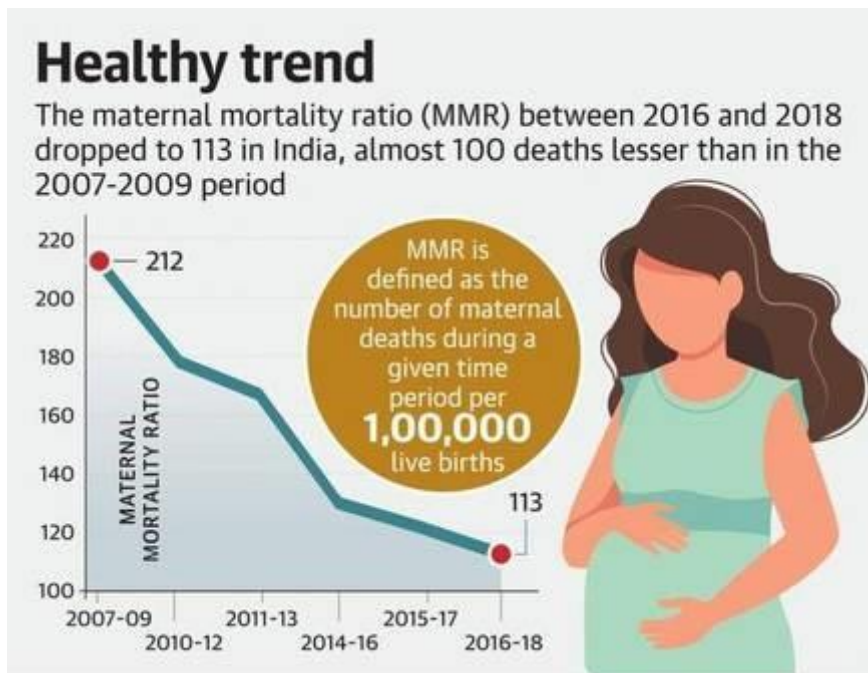
Conclusion:

- In managing health risks, **emission reduction should be coupled with a stronger public health system**.
- Right now, **government spending on health is just 1.6% of GDP**, low for a lower middle-income country.
- Most countries, including India, fail the test of readiness for health disasters, according to the **2019 Global Health Security Index**.
- The cleaner air the country is still breathing during the pandemic should be a **powerful motivation**.
- **Scientific warnings** do not indicate the time and place of calamities but do **call for** confronting air pollution and global warming and strengthening health systems before the **next health emergency** that is surely going to happen.

6. Maternal death rate declining: report

Context:

- **India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** has seen a decline from 130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016 to 122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017.
- A decline of 8 points (6.2%) was observed during this period, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for MMR.
- This is good news for India as **nearly 2,000 maternal deaths** have been averted per year, according to the bulletin.
- The figure has declined from 167 in 2011-2013 to 130 in 2014-2016 and to 122 in 2015-17, registering a 6.15 per cent reduction since the last survey figures of 2014-2016.
- While Karnataka has shown the highest percentage decline in MMR, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have shown an increase by 15 points each in MMR.



Importance of monitoring Maternal Mortality rate:

- Maternal mortality in a region is a **measure of reproductive health of women** in the area.
- As per the World Health Organization, maternal death is the death of a woman while **pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy**, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.
- One of the key indicators of maternal mortality is the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) which is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period.
- The **target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** set by United Nations aims at reducing the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.

Maternal mortality situation in the country: Categorization of states:

To understand the maternal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes, especially at the regional level, the government has categorised states into **three groups**:

1. **Empowered action group (EAG):** Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh/Uttarakhand and Assam fall under the EAG.
2. **Southern States:** Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the southern States group.
3. **Other states:** "Others" comprise the remaining States and Union Territories.

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh/Uttarakhand and Assam fall under the EAG and Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the southern States group. "Others" comprise the remaining States and Union Territories.

- The **decline has been most significant in EAG States** from 188 to 175. The ratio has reduced considerably from 77 to 72 per 1,00,000 live births among southern states and in the other states from 93 to 90.
- Independent MMR data of Jharkhand (76), Chhattisgarh (141) and Uttarakhand (89) has been released for the first time in the SRS 2015-2017 bulletin.

The Sustainable Development Goals and Maternal Mortality:

- In the context of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**, countries have united behind a new target to accelerate the decline of maternal mortality by 2030.
- **SDG 3** includes an ambitious target: “reducing the global MMR to less than 70 per 100 000 births, with no country having a maternal mortality rate of more than twice the global average”.
- Improving maternal health is one of **WHO’s key priorities**.
- WHO works to contribute to the **reduction of maternal mortality** by increasing research evidence, providing **evidence-based clinical and programmatic guidance**, setting global standards, and providing technical support to Member States on developing and **implementing** effective policy and programmes.

Reasons for Declining MMR:

Focus on quality and coverage of health services through public health initiatives have contributed majorly to the decline. Some of these initiatives are:

- LaQshya, Poshan Abhiyan, Janani Suraksha Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.
- The implementation of the Aspirational District Programme and inter-sectoral action has helped to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable population.
- Recently launched **Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan Initiative (SUMAN)** especially focuses on **zero preventable maternal and newborn deaths**.
- The continuous progress in reducing the MMR will help the country to achieve the SDG 3 target of MMR below 70 by 2030.

LaQshya: Labour room Quality Improvement Initiative:

- Recently, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched “**LaQshya (Labour room Quality Improvement Initiative)** to improve the quality of care in the labour room and maternity operation theatres in public health facilities.
- **Aim of the LaQshya program** is to reduce preventable maternal and newborn mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in the Labour Room and Maternity Operation Theatre (OT) and ensure respectful maternity care.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion, throughout this crisis, women will continue to become pregnant and give birth, **deserving the right to safe maternity services**. This includes physical and emotional safety for the mother and baby.
- Hence, a **well-managed system** that allows pregnant women to access maternal health care with minimum exposure risk is essential during the outbreak.
- Simultaneously, **task sharing with community health workers** under regulatory and legal provisions must be explored.
- **E-training mechanisms and capacity building exercises** must be undertaken for the additionally requisitioned health workforce to reduce the workload of time-sensitive commitments and non-health work.
- Importantly, the health workers must also be trained to reduce the risk, stigma and **sensitization of pregnant women** on COVID-19 symptoms, prevention and hygiene.

7. The World Bank's STARS project needs an overhaul

Context:

- **Atmanirbhar Bharat** calls for an India that is **able to produce and deliver local goods and services to its citizens**.
- This applies **equally to education for all children**. Delivering a service, like education, requires a capable state, especially given the scale and complexity of its large and diverse population.
- **Building state capability** involves a process of learning to do things on one's own. This is precisely the idea behind an Atmanirbhar Bharat. Fundamentally, therefore, it cannot be outsourced.

WORLD BANK FUNDED PROJECT STARS: A CRITIQUE

The project STARS or "Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States" is a quarter trillion rupees education project in six states in India, part-funded by a loan from the World Bank. A portion of the funds are proposed to be spent in partnership with non-state actors including handing over operation and management of government schools to non-state actors, outsourcing services, seeking support of management firms/NGOs and direct benefit transfers as school vouchers. The overarching framing of the loan needs to be revised in context of the COVID-19 pandemic, pilot partnerships with the private sector should be removed and replaced with measures to strengthen the public sector, and a stronger focus on equity built in.

World Bank's STARS to shine on State:

1. **Kerala** is among the **six States** in the country to benefit from the **World Bank's \$500 million Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States (STARS) Programme aimed at improving the quality and governance of school education**.
2. Around 250 million students in the age group of 6 and 17 in 1.5 million schools and over 10 million teachers will benefit from the programme approved by the World Bank Board of Executive Directors.
3. The programme will also **strengthen public school education and support the country's goal of providing education for all**.
4. The **\$500-million loan** from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has a final maturity of 14.5 years, including a grace period of five years.
5. Through the **Samagra Shiksha**, and in partnership with Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan, STARS will help improve learning assessment; strengthen instruction and remediation; facilitate school-to-work transition; and strengthen governance and decentralised management.
6. In other words, **state capability is about getting things done in the government**, and by the government, by **ensuring effective implementation** that is **responsive to local needs**, but also about being able to design and conduct reforms.
7. However, the **World Bank's STARS project**, a **\$3 billion project** to improve education in six Indian States, has the mistaken understanding that state capability should be built by giving a larger role to non-state actors and by increasing the use of technology.
8. Both these premises are misguided as they do not contribute to the capability of the state to deliver better education.
9. The reason is that there are some preconditions for **effective governance within the public sector** that must be met before either technology or non-state actors can be useful.

For effective governance:

1. **First, the administration must be equipped with adequate physical, financial and human resources:**
 - An **overburdened bureaucracy** with vacancies and without basic equipment cannot be expected to be effective.
 - Often one hears that increasing inputs is a waste of resources as they are used inefficiently.
 - This criticism neglects the fact that for efficiency, a critical minimum level of resources is a precondition. Unfortunately, in the education sector we are short of that level in all areas.
2. Second, **administrative or governance reforms** must give greater discretion to the front-line bureaucracy **to address local issues and innovate** if required:
 - This is as much a function of **better resources at the local level** as of greater decentralisation of decision-making or political authorisation.
 - The movement against corruption and **towards accountability** has had an unfortunate fallout on innovation for fear of misuse of an increased room for manoeuvre.
 - Yet, for reforms to be successful, public sector entities need to be able to try new things, and at times, to fail.
 - Outsourcing to non-state partners not just takes away discretion from state actors but also a sense of accountability and ownership towards their job.
3. Third, **there needs to be trust within the administration** among peers and across different levels within the administration:
 - If suspicion is the guiding principle, institutional arrangements will be geared to monitoring and surveillance, not support and improvement.
 - *The goal must be to improve, not to judge and punish.*

A flawed approach: Why is the STARS approach to build state capacity flawed?

First, it fails to address the basic capacity issues:

1. **Major vacancies** across the **education system** from District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), district and block education offices, to teachers in schools, remain unaddressed.
2. **Without capable and motivated faculty**, teacher education and training cannot be expected to improve.
3. Similarly, at the **block level**, an already **overburdened bureaucracy** cannot be expected to perform miracles **without a substantial increase** in trained manpower, support staff and other forms of institutional support.

Second, the **Bank ignores that decentralising decision-making** requires the devolution of funds and real decision-making power.

1. **Greater decentralisation** can allow **accountability** to flow to the people rather than to supervising officers.
2. It requires **not just investment** in the capacity of the front-line bureaucracy but also in increasing their discretionary powers while **fostering social accountability**.
3. The issue of discretion hinges crucially on trust – the third, important element requiring attention if state capability is to be enhanced.
4. Trust, which implies listening and collaborating across different levels within the administration, is entirely ignored in the World Bank project.
5. Instead, the Bank displays yet again an **over-reliance on Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** as a panacea that lacks any backing in evidence. It is based instead on the idea that a flawed system can be fixed merely through the injection of more and better technology.

6. In fact, technology does not address most of the systemic or governance challenges; it simply by-passes them.
7. This is not to deny that technology has its uses, but its usefulness depends on whether preconditions for an **effective use of ICT-systems** have been put in place.
8. Otherwise the likelihood of exacerbating, rather than solving, problems increases. Technology as a short-cut to creating a capable state has not worked in the past.

Third, Measurement is seen as a way to improve performance:

1. Yet, just like fever does not go away by checking the temperature more frequently, **service delivery does not improve by measurement alone**.
2. It is important to know that temperature is high, but more important to understand why it is so. **Schools in India need improvement**.
3. Lastly, **outsourcing basic governance functions** by “expanding private initiatives” and “reducing government tasks” will not make education “more relevant to local needs” or “democratically promote **people’s participation by empowering local authorities**” as stated in the project document.
4. Institutions of the state, from State-level officials who design policy changes, to district-, block-, cluster- and school-level officials who adapt those policies for solving local problems rely on past experience (institutional memory) to meet new challenges and build additional memories with every new reform they undertake.
5. **New private initiatives** do not have these institutional memories, nor do they have a **grasp of socio-cultural realities** that play an important part in the delivery process.
6. While **state structures need to develop more skills** to enable them to solve **both local and structural problems** more effectively, it is not clear how they can be imparted by agencies that are extraneous to both the context and the system.

Conclusion:

- In its current form, STARS is bound to fail to deliver its core objective: to reform the governance architecture in order to improve the quality of education.
- If we want **DIETs, block and community resource centres**, and schools to be **atma nirbhar**, we need to enable them **to develop their own capability to reform themselves**.
- Outsourcing, an **over-reliance on measurement** by standardised assessments, and an **excessive use of ICT** will not get us closer to an Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- The World Bank would do well to learn from its past mistakes and use evidence, often times generated by its own research arms, to formulate projects.

8. Why building economic bridges in the neighbourhood matters

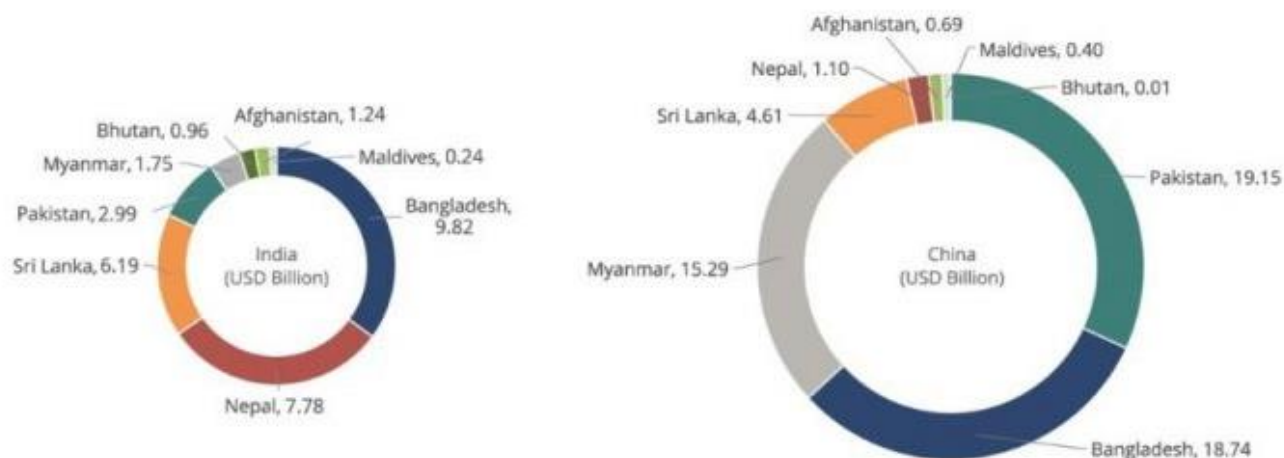
Introduction:

- Despite **geographical proximity** and the existence of **bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements (FTAs)**, South Asia is one of the least economically integrated regions in the world.
- Owing to *protectionist policies, high logistics cost, lack of political will and a broader trust deficit*, intra-regional trade in South Asia remains well below its potential at 5% of the region’s global trade.
- This makes South Asia one of the most disconnected regions in the world, especially when compared with other regions such as East Asia and the Pacific, where intra-regional trade accounts for approximately 50% of total trade.
- Sub-Saharan Africa, where intra-regional trade has improved over the years to 22% due to the steps taken by governments to create transparent mechanisms for trade facilitation.

- Intra-regional trade in the South Asian region (including Myanmar) amounts to only 5.6% (2017).

Figure 3: Country-wise share of India's and China's Total Trade with South Asia (N8) in 2018

Bangladesh accounts for approx. one-third of China's trade with South Asia



Note: All figures are in USD Billion
Source: WITS, World Bank

Context:

- At a time when it is increasingly worried about **growing Chinese economic and strategic relationships** in the region, India is **missing a “costless” trick**.
- As the numbers show, it can **trade a lot more within the region**, both in terms of exports and imports.
- This piece **focuses more on India's imports from South Asia**, because larger and more sophisticated economies usually **open up their markets** before their smaller and less industrialised trading partners do.
- In effect, the former provide the latter with an “early harvest”.
- Indeed, India has accepted such “**asymmetric” liberalisation**, and, in 2012, provided **unilateral duty-free access to its market** for the least developed countries **from South Asia** (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal).

Can India take any measure to follow up on such liberalisation, and try to increase its \$4.6 billion imports from South Asia?

- Incidentally, its exports to the region were \$24.6 billion.
- However, trade is an autonomous, private sector driven activity, based on the principle of comparative advantage.
- So how does the “Can-India-import-more-from-South-Asia” question become valid? It becomes valid when there are artificial barriers to trade, which affect one set of countries more than others.

India's trade regime discriminates against fellow South Asian countries:

- As pointed out in the **World Bank report — A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia**.
- An **index of overall trade restrictiveness** developed in the report is two to nine times higher for Indian, Nepalese, Sri Lankan and Pakistani imports from South Asia than for imports from the rest of the world.

- This is also reflected in the calculation of **potential intra-regional goods trade**, which was estimated at \$67 billion versus actual trade of \$23 billion in 2015.

India should focus on three broad sets of measures to encourage imports from South Asia:

One, encourage the **Indian private sector to invest more in the neighbourhood**.

1. This is perhaps the measure with the **highest long-run payoffs** for both India and its neighbours.
2. **Trade and investment are intimately linked**, especially in the form of cross-border value chains.
3. By investing in neighbouring countries, Indian firms can help accelerate regional value chains, which will **increase regional trade** in parts and components.
4. Such opportunities can arise in sectors like IT services, tourism, spices, garments, leather products, agriculture products, to name just a few.
5. Likewise, firms from neighbouring countries can invest in India, **to create the same positive impact on regional trade and value chains**.

Two, keep **improving the hard and soft infrastructure** that enables trade and investment.

1. **Trade costs** between countries in South Asia are disproportionately high.
2. The **average trading cost** between country pairs in South Asia is 20 per cent higher than among country pairs in ASEAN, and it is cheaper for India to trade with Brazil than with Pakistan.
3. To address this, India could **accelerate its border post upgrading programme**, but the **soft measures** are as important.
4. These include introducing electronic data interchange, risk management systems and single windows at more locations along India's borders.
5. The eventual goal should be to have **seamless clearance of imports at the borders**, with only random (say 2-3 per cent) checking of consignments.
6. This system will work best if both exporting and importing country authorities are on the same page, sharing data electronically, and setting up agreed and preferably harmonised systems for cargo clearances.

Three, Take **pro-active steps to help neighbours address India's non-tariff measures (NTMs)**:

1. NTMs are policy measures other than tariffs that affect trade, and include quotas, sanitary regulations, and licensing.
2. Even though NTMs are **legitimate** and are imposed by all trading nations, border authorities can **create burdens for traders** in their implementation; even if implemented efficiently, NTMs can be **more difficult to tackle** in poor capacity environments.
3. India could undertake **campaigns and workshops** in exporting countries to **disseminate information** about its NTMs, and also listen to concerns about its NTMs from exporters.
4. While such sessions have been done on a somewhat **ad-hoc basis**, as in Sri Lanka, they could be made **more systematic and regular**.

Another positive step could be for India **to help with capacity building for standards and testing**, so that exporters from neighbouring countries can more easily certify their products as conforming to Indian standards.

For instance, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has been providing technical support to the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution to help in standardisation and conformity assessment.

The BIS has similarly worked with its counterparts in Nepal and Afghanistan. Such **capacity building support could be made more systematic and intensive**.

Conclusion: Underestimated in Trade terms with South Asia and South East Asia:

- **Enhancing intra-regional trade** is necessary to increase connectivity in the South Asian region.
- Facilitated by the flow of goods, services, people, and knowledge, such an initiative would provide access to new markets as well as attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in diverse sectors.
- *The ensuing economic growth would also play a key role in bridging the trust deficit in the region and raise the opportunity cost of conflict.*
- The importance of these measures should **not be underestimated**. Size and capacity asymmetry make its neighbours view India with suspicion and mistrust.
- A **more pro-active India**, seeking to **encourage imports** and build economic bridges in its neighbourhood “a win-win for all sides” will generate much goodwill in the region.
- So far, India imports more from the seven other South Asian countries than China (\$4.6 billion vs \$3.6 billion), but it could be only a matter of time before it is overtaken, even in this regard.
- A stated intention to **increase imports from South Asia** will go down well with India’s neighbours.
- And as **trade and cross-border investment are interlinked and mutually beneficial**, it will be good for India as well.

9. Control, not delete: On China apps ban

Leaders' Differing Perspectives



Context:

- The Indian government announced it would **block 59 widely used apps** (such as Tik Tok, ShareIt, Cam scanner etc.), most linked to Chinese companies.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), invoked Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 to cite the concerns regarding **both data security and national sovereignty associated with these apps**.
- Though the government has proposed this ban from the **perspective of data security and privacy**, the action seems to form a part of the **retaliatory strategy against Chinese incursions in Ladakh**.

Blocking Apps due to “the emergent nature of threats” posed by the apps:

1. Citing concerns to both **data security and national sovereignty**, the Indian government on June 29 announced it would **block 59 widely used apps**, most linked to Chinese companies.
2. These include the popular video-sharing social networking app TikTok, a mobile browser called UC Browser, and a file-sharing app called SHAREit.
3. What is common to all three is their **wide user base in India**, with each claiming more than 100 million monthly active users, and their origins in China.
4. Explaining the ban, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology cited “the emergent nature of threats” posed by the apps and “information available” that they are engaged in activities “**prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order**”.
5. The apps, according to the Ministry, had been reported for “stealing and surreptitiously transmitting users’ data in an unauthorized manner to servers which have locations outside India”, which “**impinges upon the sovereignty and integrity of India**”.
6. From the perspective of data security and privacy, there is indeed a strong case to be made to **more strictly regulate apps** that handle vast amounts of user data. Such a move was surely long overdue.
7. But the government might have done the right thing for the wrong reasons. The timing of the move, coupled with the fact that it has chosen to block the apps outright, rather than ensure they were complying with the law, suggests the **ban is less motivated by privacy concerns** than about sending a message to China amid the tensions along the border.
8. After all, **privacy and data security concerns** are not limited only to Chinese apps. Concerns about many of these apps are hardly new, and the move to block them comes after these apps had already amassed hundreds of millions of users in India.
9. If sending a message about China is the motivation, **the ban is more signalling than substance**.
10. It may help the government show the public it is taking China on, even if it will have **no impact on deterring Chinese behaviour on the border**, which will require a tough diplomatic and military response.

Personal Data Protection Bill 2019:

1. The Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019 is the India’s first attempt to **domestically legislate on the issue of data protection**.
 2. The physical attributes of data where data is stored, where it is sent, where it is turned into something useful are called **data flows**.
 3. Data localisation arguments are premised on the idea that data flows determine who has access to the data, who profits off it, who taxes and who “owns” it.
 4. The Bill also requires social media companies, which are **deemed significant data fiduciaries** based on factors such as volume and sensitivity of data, to develop their own user verification mechanism.
 5. This intends to **decrease the anonymity of users and prevent trolling**.
 6. Data localisation can help law-enforcement agencies access data for investigations and enforcement.
 7. As of now, much of cross-border data transfer is governed by individual bilateral “mutual legal assistance treaties”. Accessing data through this route is a cumbersome process.
 8. In this context, the government policy on data protection must not deter framing any policy for the growth of the digital economy, to the extent that **it doesn’t impinge on personal data privacy**.
- The Digital India story is globally tracked. Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent are part of **the digital ‘Silk Route’ of China**. The ban of the 59 Chinese Apps in India, will negatively impact the valuations of these apps and their respective promoters.
 - Case in point – the upcoming IPO of TikTok – 30% user base comes from India. This will impact the TikTok valuations negatively.

If Trade Ban happens: Will hurt the Indian poor the most?

- More often than not, the **poorest consumers are the worst-hit in a trade ban** of this kind because they are the most price-sensitive.

- For instance, if Chinese ACs were replaced by either costlier Japanese ACs or less efficient Indian ones, richer Indians may still survive this ban by buying the costlier option but a number of poor, who could have otherwise afforded an AC, would either have to forgo buying one because it is now too costly (say a Japanese or European firm) or suffer (as a consumer) by buying a less efficient Indian one.
- Similarly, the Chinese products that are in India are already paid for. By banning their sale or avoiding them, **Indians will be hurting fellow Indian retailers.**
- Again, this hit would be proportionately more on the poorest retailers because of their relative inability to cope with the unexpected losses.

Will barely hurt China:

Still, some may argue that we want to single out China because it has killed our soldiers at the border and we will now punish it through trade.

Then the question is: Will banning trade hurt China?

1. The truth is the exact opposite. It will hurt India and Indian far more than it will hurt China.
2. Let's look at the facts again. While China accounts for 5% of India's exports and 14% of India's imports — in US\$ value terms India's imports from China (that is, China's exports) are just 3% of China's total exports. More importantly, China's imports from India are less than 1% of its total imports.
3. The point is that if India and China stop trading then on the face of it China would lose only 3% of its exports and less than 1% of its imports, while India will lose 5% of its exports and 14% of its imports.
4. Moreover, if one takes the notion of not letting China profit from the Indian purchasing power strictly, then Indians should also avoid buying all products that use Chinese goods and labour.
5. So, forget the several obvious Chinese brands and products, Indian consumers would have to go about figuring out if China gains any money from, say, the iPhones that are sold in India. Or if the steel used in a European gadget is Chinese or not.
6. **On the whole, it is much easier for China to replace India than for India to replace China.**

Raising tariffs is mutually assured destruction:

- It has also been argued that India should just slap **higher import duties** on Chinese goods. Others have suggested that India can allow primary and intermediate goods from China at zero duty, but **apply prohibitive tariffs on final goods.**
- Even leaving aside the rules of the World Trade Organization that India would be violating, this is a poor strategy since others not just China can and most likely will reciprocate in the same way.
- What will also go against India here is its relatively insignificant presence in global trade and value chains.
- **In other words, it is relatively easy for the world to bypass India and carry on trading if India doesn't play by the rules.**

Conclusion:

- Given that **India's digital economy** is one of the largest markets in the world, such a ban will certainly have an **impact on the valuations of Chinese companies.**
- However, such a move is likely to have an **impact on the India-China border dispute.**
- The **tensions on the border**, as well as the **COVID-19 pandemic**, have ignited a much-needed debate on India's economic dependencies on China.
- India remains reliant on Chinese products in **several critical and strategically sensitive sectors**, from semiconductors and active pharmaceutical ingredients to the telecom sector, where Chinese vendors are involved not only in India's 4G network but in on-going 5G trials as well.
- India faces tough choices going forward in dealing with its **deep economic embrace of China.** Hitting the delete button on social media and gaming apps barely scratches the surface of the problem.

10. Reviving SAARC to deal with China

Context:

- As **India-China border tensions** continue to fester, a **hegemonic China**, as part of its global expansionism, is chipping away at India's interests in South Asia.
- This should be a major cause for concern for New Delhi. China's proximity to Pakistan is well known. Nepal is moving closer to China for ideational and material reasons.
- China is wooing Bangladesh by offering tariff exemption to 97% of Bangladeshi products, and has intensified its ties with Sri Lanka through massive investments.
- According to a **Brookings India study**, most South Asian nations are now largely dependent on China for imports despite geographical proximity to India.

About South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC):

- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- The idea of regional cooperation in South Asia was first raised in November 1980. After consultations, the foreign secretaries of the seven founding countries—**Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka** met for the first time in Colombo in April 1981.
- Afghanistan became the newest member of SAARC** at the 13th annual summit in 2005. The Headquarters and Secretariat of the Association are at Kathmandu, Nepal.

Importance of SAARC:

- SAARC comprises **3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% (US\$2.9 trillion) of the global economy.**
- It is the **world's most densely populated region** and one of the **most fertile areas**. SAARC countries have common tradition, dress, food and culture and political aspects thereby synergizing their actions.
- Game changer for India's Act East Policy:** by linking South Asian economies with South East Asian will bring further economic integration and prosperity to India mainly in the Services Sector.
- All the SAARC countries have **common problems and issues** like poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, natural disasters, internal conflicts, industrial and technological backwardness, low GDP and poor socio-economic condition and uplift their living standards thereby creating common areas of development and progress having common solutions.
- Geostrategic significance:** Can counter China (OBOR initiative) through engaging Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka in development process and economic cooperation.



The first summit was held on Dec 8, 1985 in Dhaka with seven member countries: India, the Maldives, Bhutan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka



Reinvigorating SAARC:

- Several foreign policy experts argue that **India's strategic dealing with China** has to begin with **South Asia**.
- In this regard, it is important **to reinvigorate SAARC**, which has been in the doldrums since 2014.
- In the last few years, due to **increasing animosity with Pakistan**, India's political interest in SAARC dipped significantly. India has been trying hard to isolate Pakistan internationally for its role in promoting terrorism in India.
- However, as Professor S.D. Muni argues, Pakistan is not facing any isolation internationally. India started investing in other regional instruments, such as BIMSTEC, as an alternative to SAARC.
- However, BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC for reasons such as **lack of a common identity and history among all BIMSTEC members**.
- Moreover, BIMSTEC's focus is on the Bay of Bengal region, thus making it an inappropriate forum to engage all South Asian nations.

Domestic challenges for India that need to be resolved:

There are **two major domestic challenges** that India faces in **revitalising SAARC**.

1. First, **to reap political dividends at home**, and for ideological reasons, there has been an unrelenting top-dressing of anti-Pakistan rhetoric and Islamophobia on the Indian soil.
2. There's also a recurrent use of the '**Bangladeshi migrant**'. Such majoritarian politics influences foreign policy in undesirable ways.
3. It **dents India's soft power** of being a **liberal and secular democracy**, which gives **moral legitimacy to India's leadership** in the region.
4. This divisive domestic politics fuels an anti-India sentiment in India's neighbourhood.
5. Second, the **economic vision** of the Modi government remains convoluted.
6. It's unclear what the slogans of *atma nirbharta* (self-reliance) and 'vocal for local' mean. The government's economic advisers contend that this does not mean autarky.
7. On the other hand, the Prime Minister and Ministers are stating that India needs to **cut down its dependence on imports**, thus signalling a return to the obsolete economic philosophy of import substitution.
8. If this marks sliding back to protectionism, one is unsure if India will be interested in **deepening South Asian economic integration**.

Impact of COVID-19 on SAARC:

- Major concern is of an escalation in the ***virus's spread in the subcontinent***.
- South Asia has seen a much lower incidence globally, but given its much higher population density, it is clear that any ***outbreak will lead to far more casualties***.
- Afghanistan and Pakistan have specific challenges as they share long borders with Iran, which has emerged, after China and Italy, as a major hub of the virus.
- Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka worry about the impact on tourism, which is a mainstay of their economies.
- Other concerns are about under-reporting, as fewer people are being tested in much of South Asia
- **Inadequate public health service infrastructure** to cope with rising cases, as all SAARC members are developing nations with sub-standard public health infrastructure.

Way Forward:

1. One way to infuse life in SAARC is **to revive the process of South Asian economic integration**.
2. South Asia is one of the **least integrated regions** in the world with intra-regional trade teetering at **barely 5% of total South Asian trade**, compared to 25% of intra-regional trade in the ASEAN region.
3. While South Asian countries have signed trade treaties, the **lack of political will and trust deficit** has prevented any meaningful movement.
4. According to the World Bank, **trade in South Asia stands at \$23 billion** of an estimated value of **\$67 billion**.
5. India should take the lead and work with its neighbours **to slash the tariff and non-tariff barriers**.
6. There's a need to **resuscitate the negotiations** on a SAARC investment treaty, pending since 2007.
7. According to the **UN Conference on Trade and Development**, intra-ASEAN investments constitute around **19% of the total investments** in the region.
8. The SAARC region can likewise benefit from **higher intra-SAARC investment flows**.
9. **Deeper regional economic integration will create greater interdependence** with India acquiring the central role, which, in turn, would serve India's strategic interests too.

Conclusion:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well by reaching out to SAARC leaders earlier this year, but such flash in the pan moments won't help without sustained engagement.
- In a region increasingly targeted by **Chinese investment and loans**, SAARC could be a common platform to demand **more sustainable alternatives for development**, or to oppose trade tariffs together, or to demand better terms for South Asian labour around the world.
- SAARC, as an organisation, reflects the **South Asian identity of the countries**, historically and contemporarily.
- This is a naturally made **geographical identity**. Equally, there is a **cultural, linguistic, religious and culinary affinity that defines South Asia**.

11. Lost opportunity: On India losing Chabahar project

Context: India Dropped from Chabahar Rail Project:

- Iran has decided to move ahead with the construction of a railway line from Chabahar port to Zahedan without any assistance from India **due to delay in funding**.
- The **railway line project** was part of India's commitment to the trilateral agreement with Afghanistan and Iran to build an alternate trade route to **Afghanistan and Central Asia**.
- Completion of this project would give India access to Afghanistan and beyond to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Europe via 7,200-km-long multi-modal North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

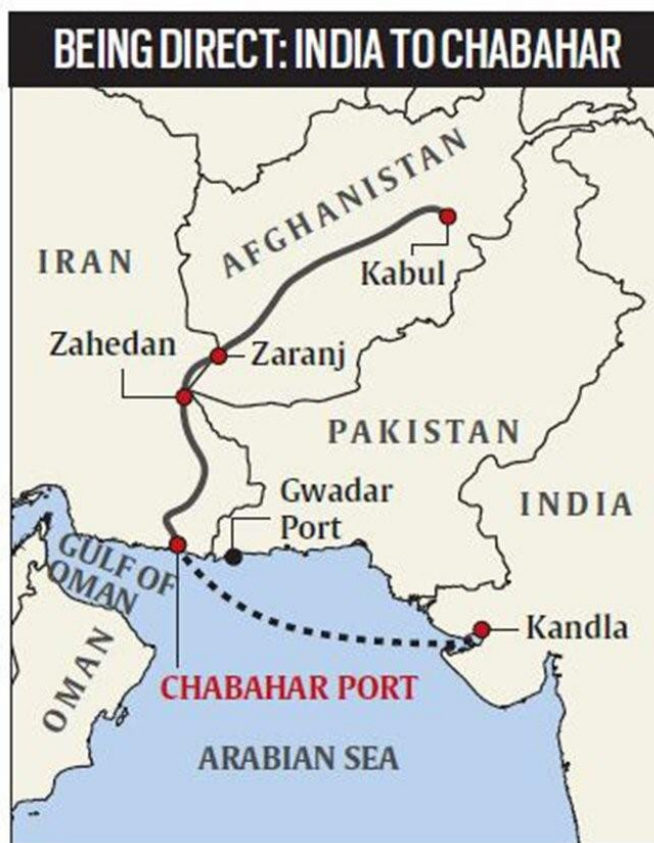
About Chabahar Port:

- Located on the **Gulf of Oman** and is the **only oceanic port** of the country. With this, India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.
- It will also boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- It also helps India counter Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. **Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea**.

- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

MoU 2016: India would be granted a 10-year lease to develop Chabahar Port:

- Right from the beginning of its tenure, the government has underlined the **geostrategic importance** it attaches to the Chabahar port project.
- The project, signed in 2003, has been a symbol of **traditionally important India-Iran ties**.
- Connected by sea lanes to ports on **India's west coast**, Chabahar would form the fulcrum of **India's outreach to Russia and Central Asia**, enhancing **connectivity, energy supplies and trade**.
- Given that **Pakistan had blocked Indian aid to Afghanistan and all trade over land**, Chabahar provided India an alternative to permanently bypass its troublesome neighbour.
- As a result, the government **fast-tracked plans for the project**, and in 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Tehran to sign a trilateral trade and transit agreement with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani.
- According to the MoUs, India would be granted a 10-year lease to develop and operate two terminals and five berths, access to the Chabahar free trade zone, and the opportunity to build the 628 km rail line from Chabahar to Zahedan, just across the border from Afghanistan.
- The government acted quickly to **develop Chabahar port facilities**, sent exports to Afghanistan in 2018, and has moved over half-a-million tonnes of cargo, including grains and food supplies, for Afghanistan again, through the port.
- Indian Railways Construction Ltd (IRCON) had promised assistance to the railway line project besides financing worth \$1.6 billion. However, the work was never started as the United States imposed sanctions on Iran.
- While there was a **waiver on US sanctions** for the **specific railway line project**, India found it hard to pick equipment suppliers who were worried about possible action from the US.



Concerns for India due to delay in projects:

- The Iran-China deal impinges on India's strategic ties with Iran and the use of Chabahar port.
- However, the **rail line has never taken off** for a number of reasons despite a commitment from state-owned IRCON, to undertake its construction at an **estimated \$1.6 billion**.
- While **contract changes** by the Iranian side and **delayed responses** from the Indian side were part of the problem, the **main hurdle has been the fear of American penalties**.
- Even though India was able to **negotiate a sanctions waiver** for the Chabahar port and rail line from the U.S., few international construction and equipment partners were willing to sign on to the project; New Delhi has also dragged its feet on the matter.
- After appeals to India, including one issued by its Foreign Minister when he visited Delhi in January this year, Iran decided to go on its own, by beginning to lay tracks for the line **connecting Chabahar to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan**.
- Bandar-e-Jask** lies to the west of Chabahar and right before the Strait of Hormuz which would allow China to extend its control along the Pakistan-Iran coast.

7. Each of these possibilities should be watched closely by India and it should ***strengthen its relations with the concerned countries.***

25-year Strategic Partnership: Iran and China:

- Meanwhile, complicating matters further, **Iran and China** are close to **finalising a 25-year Strategic Partnership** which will include Chinese involvement in Chabahar's duty free zone, an oil refinery nearby, and possibly a larger role in Chabahar port as well.
- "Comprehensive Plan for Cooperation between Iran and China", being finalised by officials in Tehran and Beijing, the cooperation will extend from investments in infrastructure, manufacturing and upgrading energy and transport facilities, to refurbishing ports, refineries and other installations, and will commit Iranian oil and gas supplies to China during that period.
- Iranian officials denied a report that also suggested Chabahar port, where India took, will be leased to China.
- However, Iran proposed a tie-up between the Chinese-run Pakistani port at Gwadar and Chabahar last year, and has offered interests to China in the Bandar-e-Jask port 350km away from Chabahar, as well as in the Chabahar duty free zone.

Conclusion:

- Regardless of the reasons for India's inability to join the railway project, the decision can only be seen as an opportunity lost.
- The impression that India wavered due to U.S. pressure, especially after India cancelled oil imports from Iran, also questions ***India's commitment to strategic autonomy.***
- While Iran claims it will fund the railway using its own resources, it seems to have embarked on the **Chabahar-Zahedan project** with a confidence borne from an imminent deal with **China for a 25-year, \$400 billion** strategic partnership on infrastructure, connectivity and energy projects.
- In a world where **connectivity** is seen as the **new currency**, India's loss could well become China's gain, and India must watch this space, created by its exit, closely.

12. India should believe in the EU

EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

- European Union (EU) is an international organization comprising 28 European countries and governing common economic, social, and security policies.
- A united Europe was the answer to repeated attempts of an ambitious Germany to expand, which resulted in 2 world wars.
- The EU's members are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Context:

- In a new initiative to **revive talks on a free trade agreement** that have been suspended since 2013, the two sides of India and European Union announced a “**high level dialogue**” to try and take the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) forward.
- India and the European Union committed to a **framework for strategic cooperation until 2025**, and vowed to cooperate on their response to the coronavirus pandemic, and at the **United Nations Security Council**.
- “**India and the E.U. are natural partners**,” said Mr. Modi in his opening remarks.
- Our partnership is important for global peace and stability, and this reality is clearer given the situation around the world.
- PM also referred to shared “**universal values**” of **democracy, pluralism, inclusivity**, respect for international institutions and multilateralism between India and the E.U.

About European Union:

- The European Union is a group of 28 countries that operate as a **cohesive economic and political block**.
- 19 of these countries use EURO as their official currency. 9 EU members (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) do not use the euro.
- The EU grew out of a desire **to form a single European political entity** to end centuries of warfare among European countries that culminated with World War II and decimated much of the continent.
- The EU has **developed an internal single market** through a standardised system of laws that apply in all member states in matters, where members have agreed to act as one.

The EU and India:

- In **today's fragmented world**, the power of any aspiring global player depends on the number and quality of its bilateral and multilateral relationships. In which partner should India invest? The European Union (EU) is one.
- The EU and India have **much in common**. Both aim to **enhance strategic autonomy and their global standing**.
- **Diversifying strategic value chains** is also a common interest, as is the urgent need to address climate change. The EU and India can support each other in these endeavours.

Trade between EU and India:

1. On purely economic terms, the **EU is India's first trading partner and the biggest foreign investor**, with €67.7 billion worth of investments made in 2018, equal to **22% of total FDI inflows**.
2. But there is still room for improvement especially when compared to EU investments in China which, in the same year, amounted to €175.3 billion.
3. **Enhanced business cooperation** can help both the EU and **India diversify their strategic value chains** and reduce economic dependency notably on China.
4. India could succeed in attracting EU investment that might be moving out of China, but to do so, it must address the mutual trust deficit.
5. **Facilitating people's mobility and connectivity** is a good way to improve mutual understanding and create opportunities for innovation and growth.

Talks on FTA between EU and India:

- The EU and India must also tackle the elephant in the room: the **stagnating Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations**.

- A new study from the European Parliament assesses the **potential impact of an EU-India trade agreement** at between €8 billion and €8.5 billion gains from increased trade for both sides, with a more significant increase of trade gains likely to flow to India.
- The study also refers to additional potential gains from enhanced coordination on the provision of global public goods, such as environmental standards.
- On **climate change**, the EU is building on its **ambitious target** to render the **continent carbon-emission neutral by 2050**, through its **new industrial strategy**, the Green Deal.
- “Investing in fossil fuel-driven recovery is a wasted opportunity, and we only have one chance to make it right”, says the Executive Vice President of the European Commission.

Opportunities for India:

- Political conditions are favourable for India especially after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom.
- The Europeans recognise India’s role in helping provide peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. They see great potential in working together on technologies and issues of the future.

But India is not the only **economic alternative for Europe** in the aftermath of COVID-19. So, in order for India to **attract these shifting companies**, it has to do one of the following

1. The **Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement** has to be put back on track.
2. Conclude a **new investment agreement**, we have to join in high-technology collaboration including 5G and artificial intelligence, we may be able to align our stars.

This will require imagination from our side. Europe will also need to change its positions on trade in goods and be ready to accommodate India on services.

Ruptures caused by COVID-19:

1. The ruptures caused by COVID-19 have been the occasion for the EU to prove its worth.
2. The measures put in place at **supranational level** show a **strong willingness** to buttress the fundamental pillars on which the EU is built.
3. The **“Next generation EU proposal”** submitted by the European Commission has surprised many by its bold approach.
4. This is indeed a **game-changer**, not only in its financial implications as it allows the EU to take on debt but because it shows that the ties that bind the EU extend well beyond treaties and individual members’ self-interest.
5. But the value of the EU reaches **far beyond its economic clout**. The EU champions the rules-based international order, which is being increasingly challenged by the proliferation of exceptionalism.

Conclusion:

- Evolution of EU has roots in looking for an **integration of divided Europe** because of excessive nationalism over a long period of time which also witnessed two world wars.
- It has played an important role in **improving economic conditions and raising living standard of people** in weaker members of group.
- Should both the EU and India succeed in transforming into carbon-neutral economies by 2050, we all would gain from the investment.
- The EU and India must join forces to **promote sustainable reform of multilateral institutions**, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) first in line.
- Hence, a **strong partnership** would help both EU and India become global decision-makers.

GENERAL STUDIES - III

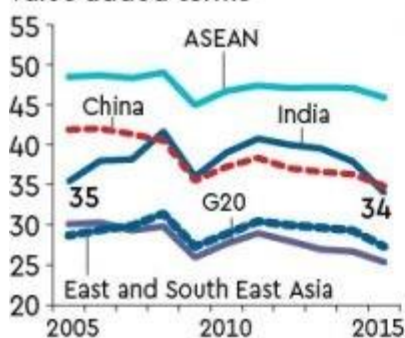
1. Why integrating with global value chains crucial for India

About Global Value Chains GVCs:

- GVC is a **world-wide phenomenon**. It works effectively when there is active participation from different economies in various stages of growth.
- It has a strong foundational link to roles, regulations, products and services, and processes across markets.
- So, understanding its functioning and assimilating it is crucial for countries like India, that are ready for the next level of growth.

Total GVC participation

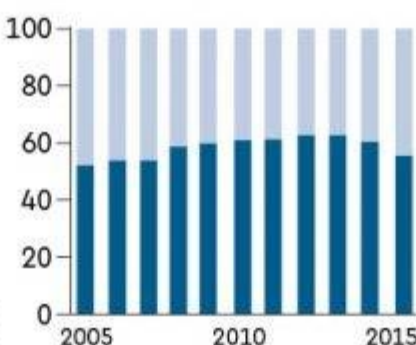
(Forward+backward)
% of gross exports in
value added terms



Source: OECD TIVA Database (2018)

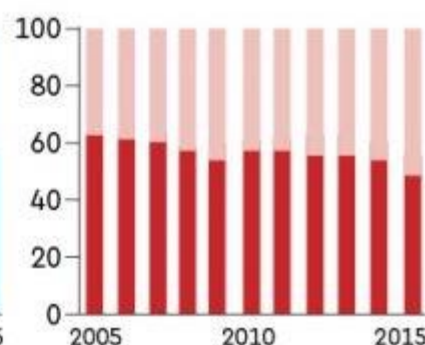
GVC profile - India

% of total GVC participation
■ Forward ■ Backward



GVC profile - China

% of total GVC participation
■ Forward ■ Backward



Context:

- The pandemic has **triggered a debate** as to whether **the global value chains (GVCs)**, which are production networks that seek to exploit gains from hyper-specialisation across countries, may **lead to increased fragility of economies actively participating in them**.
- As the experiences during the ongoing pandemic suggest, **major demand- and supply-side shocks to value chains**, and lack of redundancy planning in such networks, have posed considerable challenges to just-in-time manufacturing activities, arguably accentuating the economic vulnerabilities for countries, including India.
- Over the last decade, the **system of international production** has been grappling with challenges arising from Industry 4.0; growing economic nationalism, and sustainability concerns.
- The ongoing pandemic has fuelled calls for **further de-globalisation** of such production networks to **reduce industry- and economy-level vulnerabilities**.

To increase India's participation in global value chains through:

- India has one of the largest pools of employable talent in the world. This is a young workforce with fluent English-speaking skills.
- That is the first element which has enabled the integration by providing the people needed for some core business operations.
- This talent is also linked to being technologically savvy and hence there is a huge set of people working in technology global companies, based out of Indian cities.

1. a better understanding of India's positioning in the global production system
2. A greater capacity for value chain analysis; and
3. Using evidence base created to identify regulatory changes necessary to encourage value chain formation and to increase India's share of value added.

Global Value chains across many countries in Asia-Pacific region:

- The accompanying graphic shows the **overall GVC intensity** across selected economies and groupings in terms of percentage share of the total value added (backward plus forward) in gross exports.
- It is clear that **between 2005 and 2015**, there has been a **steady decline in GVC intensity** across all major economies.
- For India, GVC participation peaked at 41.6% in 2008, but has dropped ever since, hitting a low of around 34% in 2015.
- The **stagnation of GVC trade** since the global financial crisis, and the unfavourable impact of the ongoing pandemic on GVCs notwithstanding, there are substantial merits of widening and deepening link to GVCs, particularly for a developing country like India.

Merits of widening and deepening link to Global value chains (GVCs):

1. First, as the **World Bank's World Development Report 2020 (WDR 20)** suggests, contingent upon **deeper reforms** in developing countries and policy continuity in industrial economies, GVCs can help reduce poverty, and continue to augment growth and employment.
2. Cross-country estimates suggest that a **1% increase in GVC participation can boost per-capita income by more than 1%**, particularly when countries engage in limited and advanced manufacturing. The growth is much higher than the 0.2% income gain from standard trade.
3. Second, **GVC participation** can precipitate **significant firm-level productivity improvements**.
4. WDR 20 suggests that GVC firms engaged in manufacturing activities show **higher labour productivity** than one-way traders or non-traders, after controlling for firm-level capital intensity.
5. In particular, firms that engage in both import and export are 76% more productive than non-trading firms, compared with a 42% difference for export-only firms and a 20% difference for import-only firms.
6. Third, **backward participation in GVCs** can be particularly beneficial for economies a 10% increase in the level of GVC participation could increase average productivity by close to 1.6%.
7. As the accompanying graphic shows, while China has seen a rise in its forward GVC participation and a corresponding drop in the backward participation, the trend has been just the opposite for India.
8. India's share of foreign value-added content in total GVC trade has steadily increased from 53% in 2005 to 61% in 2014.
9. If India can seize FDI looking to relocate from China, and create conditions for firms to leverage the labour-cost arbitrage opportunities, it can capture much of the value addition at the midstream stages.
10. This will, however, necessitate deeper reforms in labour markets, trade infrastructure, and improvements in the overall business environment.
11. Policies directed towards facilitating vertical GVC linkages between domestic SMEs and larger foreign and domestic firms can go a long way towards strengthening India's relative position in GVC trade.
12. Fourth, the **OECD METRO Model** shows that **localised regimes** (less reliant on foreign suppliers) are **more vulnerable to shocks**, and result in a significantly lower level of economic activity and fall in national incomes as compared to the interconnected regimes.
13. While interconnected regimes build resilience, stability and flexibility in the production networks, localised regime offers fewer channels for adjustment to shocks.
14. Estimates for India suggest that a shift towards a **localised regime can decrease real GDP by 1.1%, and reduce import and export demand by 11.4% and 14.8%**,
15. Recent policy pronouncement for an Atmanirbhar Bharat may be antithetical to the spirit of efficiency-seeking economic interdependence typified by GVCs in the long-term.

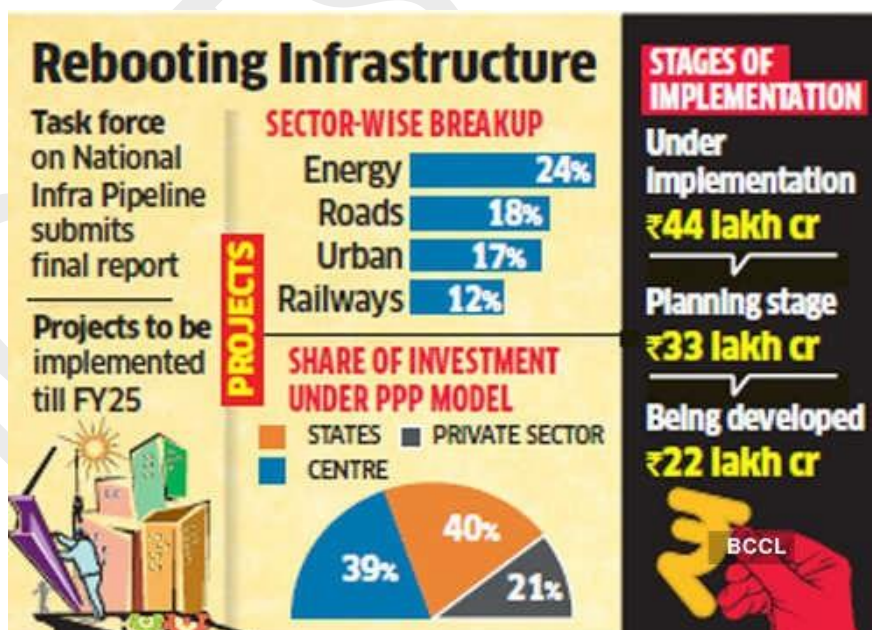
Conclusion:

- In the aftermath of the pandemic, **Regional Value Chains (RVCs)** are expected to **gain momentum** to strike a **balance between localisation and globalisation**.
- However, if the recent RCEP experience is any indication, facilitating RVCs is difficult and requires intense regional coordination, geopolitical stability and conducive systemic conditions.
- If India intends to **strike a balance** between managing vulnerabilities in GVCs (similar to those arising from the pandemic), and building resilience, it may need to **reassess its regionalisation strategy** to take advantage of the accelerated momentum towards RVCs.
- That said, long-term gains from **globally connected value chains** can far outweigh the benefits from RVCs. Not to forget, much of the recovery post-GFC was led by GVC-intensive exports. RVCs could be stepping stone and enabler for more global participation.
- Instead of a piecemeal approach, **India needs to adopt a holistic perspective focused on 'whole of the supply chain'**, by driving strategic changes in its investment-development paradigm, and through greater integration into the GVCs.

2. Infrastructure bonds floated by a development finance institution could aid a quicker recovery

Context:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought **global economic activity to a virtual halt**.
- While the world was long expecting a **recession**, the pandemic has pulled the trigger.
- The IMF estimates the **global economy to contract by -4.9 per cent** this year and the cloud to deepen should the virus not recede in the latter half of 2020.
- As for the Indian economy, growth has been **decelerating** for the past eight quarters, and indications by the RBI suggest that **growth is contracting for the first time in four decades**.



To revive economy and create demand in the cycle:

1. While the recently announced **economic package** provides much-needed near-term liquidity support and long-pending structural reforms aiming towards **medium-to-long-term stability**, we must address the elephant in the room, the need to further **aid a demand recovery**.
2. As the economy **begins to reopen**, we explore the components of aggregate demand and explain why **government expenditure** is perhaps the only component that can aid growth going forward.
3. A study by S&P Global estimates **1 per cent of GDP spend on infrastructure can boost real growth by 2 per cent while creating 1.3 million direct jobs**.
4. Historically, countries have used infrastructure to provide counter-cyclical support to the economy.

5. Some of the most remarkable references are the New Deal in the US, Germany's expansion post-WWII debt reduction (1953) and more recently with China in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis.
6. Reports suggest that **China is sticking to the same strategy** this time around with nearly \$600 billion worth of **special bonds**, it is again looking towards **infrastructure to revive growth**.

Keynesian theory of Economic growth: Demand needs to increase:

- Keynesian theory suggests that for **aggregate demand to increase, at least one of the components of GDP needs to expand**.
- Growth in the Indian economy has been dominated by consumption (PFCE), followed by investments (GFCF), government expenditure (GFCE) and net exports (NEX).
- However, **consumption and investment demand** have been subdued for the past few quarters, dragging down overall growth.

Two key factors to revive growth: Consumption and Investment demand:

1. These **two components** were perhaps casualties of a **sharp deceleration** in credit supply even after an impressive bank clean-up exercise by the government and RBI. The IL&FS debacle in September 2018 only made matters worse.
2. The **NBFC sector**, which played an important role in **fuelling India's consumption growth**, suffered from funding crunches leading to a further squeeze in credit supply, thereby **impacting consumption demand**.
3. This deceleration is likely to exacerbate going forward, with estimates suggesting that PFCE will grow at its slowest pace in 15 years.
4. While the government and RBI have taken impressive strides to **ensure adequate liquidity**, uncertain economic prospects provide little comfort for bankers to lend further.
5. Even though we may see the release of some pent-up consumption, industry-wide job/pay-cuts with a growing sense of **uncertainty over the future** may limit spending to non-discretionary items and force people towards precautionary savings.

Cause for worry is the declining rate of investments:

- Broad-based utilisation levels, as represented by the RBI, dropped to 68.6 per cent in Q3FY20, well below the 75 per cent benchmark for new capacity addition, implying **suboptimal levels of fresh investments**.
- A higher rate of investments is essential for sustainable economic growth. The deteriorating economic scenario and increasing levels of debt with rating downgrades for industries are likely to aggravate existing problems.
- With utilisation levels at historic lows and significant hurdles in raising new capital, any new capacity addition in the near-future looks highly unlikely.
- Global trade has been undergoing several disruptions since 2009. Heightened trade tensions between the US and China, with the onset of the pandemic, only make matters worse.
- As for India, our limited share in global trade along with a battered domestic and global outlook provides **little room for exports to contribute towards growth**.

Government Expenditure on Infrastructure may yield better results in near future:

1. India already has several institutions for **infrastructure development purposes** from the likes of IIFCL, IRFC to more recently NIIF.
2. However, over these years, their scale and functioning have remained inadequate. Perhaps, a relook, to restructure these into one large development institution could **help reduce inefficiencies and allow for greater leverage**.
3. Government expenditure is the **only exogenously determined element** in a Keynesian framework.
4. The positive push required to aid a demand recovery has to come through the government, seeing as there is limited room for consumption, trade or investments to expand significantly.

However, with sparse resources that India has, we **must deploy funds** that yield a higher return. One key area that can provide the **necessary support is infrastructure investment**.

Conclusion:

- Notably, **infrastructure has strong links to growth and with both supply and demand-side features that help generate employment and long-term assets**. India already has an upper hand here. Front-loading key projects with greater visibility from the recently announced National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) could aid in a quicker recovery.
- Taking a cue from China, **floating special infrastructure bonds** through this organisation to accelerate the **funding of the NIP** could aid a **speedier recovery**.
- Further, taking a page from the **New Deal and its Reconstruction Finance Corporation**, this institution's ability for **greater leverage** can be used to make amends to our credit channels as well as the development of state government and urban local body bond markets.
- This could help businesses and bankers **overcome risk aversion** and bring back trust in the system while financing new paths for growth.
- At a time when liquidity is ample and the cost is low, borrowing shouldn't be so scary. The exogenous component could step-in in a greater way, perhaps because, it is the only one that can.

3. Why has Indian Railways opened doors for private players?

Context: Indian Railways begins process for entry of 'private trains':

Indian Railways has launched the process of opening up train operations to private entities on 109 origin destination (OD) pairs of routes using 151 modern trains.

1. It has invited **Request for Qualifications proposals**, for scrutiny of vendor capabilities, from those who can bring **modern trains for operations on existing rail infrastructure**.
2. At present, scheduled passenger train services remain paralysed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and various railways have been running only specials such as those for workers.
3. Yet, the **Railway Board** has moved ahead with a **long-pending plan**, setting a **tentative schedule** for private train operations, expected to begin in 2023 and in 12 clusters.
4. The IRCTC, in which the **government is the majority shareholder**, was given pilot Tejas operations in the New Delhi-Lucknow, and Mumbai-Ahmedabad sectors. These were the first trains allowed to be run by a 'non-Railway' operator.
5. The present move takes **another step towards competing passenger train operations**, bringing new-generation trains and attracting investments of an estimated Rs.30,000 crore.

What is the background to the decision?

Several committees have gone into the expansion and the modernisation of Indian Railways.

1. In 2015, the expert panel **chaired by Bibek Debroy** constituted by the Ministry of Railways a year earlier, recommended that the **way forward for the railways was "liberalisation and not privatisation"** in order to allow entry of new operators **"to encourage growth and improve services."**
2. It also made it clear that a **regulatory mechanism was a prerequisite** to promote healthy competition and protect the interests of all stakeholders.
3. The present invitation for private operators to submit qualification bids for **151 trains** would be, in the assessment of the Railway Board, only for a fraction of the **total train operations 5% operated by Indian Railways**.
4. The overall objective, however, is to **introduce a new train travel experience for passengers** who are used to travelling by aircraft and air-conditioned buses.
5. From a passenger perspective, there is a need for more train services, particularly between big cities.

6. The Railway Board says five crore intending passengers could not be accommodated during 2019-20 for want of capacity, and **there was 13.3% travel demand in excess of supply during summer and festival seasons.**
7. Without an expansion, and with growth of road travel, ***the share of the Railways would steadily decline in coming years.***




Revolutionizing Indian Railways



Exploring new avenues by revisiting the Non-Fare Revenue Policy




- To consider unsolicited proposals of **earnings through Non-Fare sources**
- **NFR Evaluation** Committee to examine the operation, feasibility, technical & financial capacity of the proponent
- **Enable engagement of private/public sector** in conceptualization of earning scheme

#TransformingIndia

Bibek Debroy Committee:

- The Railway Board had constituted a Committee for mobilization of resources for major railway projects and restructuring of Railway Ministry and Railway Board. (Chair: Mr. Bibek Debroy).
- The Committee submitted its final report in June 2015, which has **favoured privatisation of rolling stock: Wagons and Coaches.**
- Committee has looked at the railway restructuring experiences from multiple countries, including Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Australia and USA.
- It focussed on the British experiment to achieve **two main aims**: changing the institutional structure between the government and the Indian Railways and increasing competition.
- It has also recommended ***amending the Indian Railways Act to allow the private operators to levy tariff.***

- Committee adds that in case the infrastructure becomes profitable, there is no bar on the government to have its own operator in the interest of competition.

Why is the move significant for Indian Railways?

1. For the Railways, one of the **largest organisations** in the country operating not just trains for **passengers and freight**, but also **social institutions** such as hospitals and schools, **it represents a radical change**.
2. According to data maintained by the World Bank, in 2018 **India had 68,443 route kilometres of railways**.
3. It is among the **four largest rail networks in the world**, along with the United States, China, and Russia, although every kilometre of track in India covers geographical area much less than Germany, Russia, China or Canada, indicating scope for expansion.
4. An analysis of passenger and freight operations in the Railways, taken note of by the Economic Survey and the erstwhile Planning Commission, showed that a steady shift to other modes of travel for both categories was affecting economic growth: by as much as 4.5% of GDP-equivalent.
5. It was estimated that a **one-rupee push in the railway sector would have a forward linkage effect of increasing output in other sectors by ₹2.50**.
6. The **Bibek Debroy committee** found this significant **to take the 'Make in India' objective forward**.
7. The panel also noted that passengers were willing to pay more, if they had guaranteed and better quality of travel and ease of access.
8. The move to augment capacity virtually overnight through private capital in train operations pursues this line of reasoning.

Are private train operations sustainable?

1. Train services operated by Indian Railways cover several classes of passengers, meeting the social service obligation to connect remote locations, and adopting the philosophy of cross-subsidy for passengers in low-cost trains through higher freight tariffs.
2. In more recent years, it has ***focused on revenue generation through dynamic demand-based pricing***.
3. Private operators are not expected to shoulder the **burden of universal service norms**, and will focus on revenue.
4. Even the first IRCTC-run trains have a **higher cost of travel** between Lucknow and Delhi than a Shatabdi train on the same route that almost matches it for speed.
5. So **private operators would have to raise the level of their offering** even higher, to justify higher fares, and attract a segment of the population that is ready to pay for this difference.
6. The government would have to explain that it has monetised its expensive fixed assets such as track, signalling and stations adequately for the taxpayer, who has paid for them.
7. The key piece in the scheme is the **independent regulator, recommended by expert committees**.
8. **Private rail operations** can thus be seen as a government-led pilot plan, not a full programme for unbundling of the monolithic Indian Railways, although the more attractive parts are being opened for private exploitation.

Conclusion:

- **With private trains expected to begin operations by April 2023**, the Railways said the move would only benefit travellers by way of confirmed tickets and faster trains. It also allayed fears of higher fares and job losses.
- The golden quadrilateral and golden diagonal routes would be fit for running trains at 130 km/hour.
- In order to **sustain growth, modernisation and efficiency**, the Indian Railways must redefine its role and responsibility.
- It has to completely reposition its operating role from being a direct service provider to being a supervisor of services
- There is only one flip side to the privatisation of railways in India and probably the most important one i.e., subsidised fares.

- In order to keep *Indian Railways affordable for the lower strata of the society (post privatisation)*, the government must offer subsidies and tax incentives to companies that would provide low cost services, similar to low cost airlines, to these very pockets of population.

4. A revolution in policy mindset

Context:

- As the globe reels under the onslaught of Covid-19, the major contentions floating around are about the **global economic slump and uncertainties** in the global political and economic orders.
- The pandemic, by itself, and also through various economic, social and political avenues, will affect global developmental objectives at a much broader scale.
- The impacts will be observed more prominently in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- As lockdowns ease in countries across **Asia and the Pacific** in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, one thing is clear — **a return to business** as usual is **unimaginable in a region** that was already **off track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- The virtual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development recently convened governments and stakeholders to focus on the imperative to **build back better** while keeping an **eye on the global goals**.



About SDGs:

- In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.
- 193 member countries, including India, got committed to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that require efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change while ensuring that no one was left behind.
- India played a significant role in making the declaration and its progress in achieving these goals are crucial for the world as it is home to about 17% of the world population.
- The SDG India index, released by the NITI Aayog and the United Nations, shows that the nation has a score of 58, a little beyond halfway mark in meeting the target set for 2030.

SDGs developmental goals have been affected by COVID-19 situation:

- Asia was the first to be hit by COVID-19 and feel its devastating social and economic impacts.
- Efforts to respond to the pandemic have revealed how many people in our societies live precariously close to poverty and hunger.
- Many countries are taking bold actions to minimise the loss of life and economic costs.
- As attention shifts from the immediate health and human effects of the pandemic to addressing its social and economic effects, governments and societies face unprecedented policy, regulatory and fiscal choices.
- The SDGs, a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, globally, by 2030 — can serve as a beacon in these turbulent times.

Challenges ahead:

1. A large part of the services sector in the developing world **remains unorganised** and does not feature in the digital space – neither it will be easy to place them there as almost all of it requires physical presence.
2. This inability of being accommodated in digital spaces will **lead to more poverty, hunger, and inequalities** thereby **hampering achievements of SDGs 1, 2, and 10**.
3. These are the challenges to the equity dimension of holistic development that is being posed by the pandemic severely affecting SDG3 (good health and well-being).
4. On the other hand, **reduced economic activity** in the physical space of the planet will be good for the **natural environment**: SDG13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) may get augmented.
5. The revival of dolphins and pangolins in spaces where land-use change has altered forest lands to urban agglomerations is a case in point.
6. However, sustainable development is not devoid of humans: it talks of the coexistence of biodiversity conservation, and development of the human society by meeting with the various equity needs.
7. Here one of the most crucial goals gets affected: SDG 16, which talks of peace, justice and strong institutions.
8. Large parts of the developing and underdeveloped world view this pandemic as one imported by the privileged class through international travels and free mixing in the occidental ways of life.

Grounds for optimism from the pandemic:

1. The pandemic has **exposed fragility and systemic gaps** in many key systems.
2. However, there are **many workable strategies** that countries have used to accelerate progress related to development goals and strengthen resilience.
3. Countries have taken **steps to extend universal health care systems and strengthen social protection systems**, including cash transfer and food distribution systems for vulnerable households.
4. **Accurate and regular data** have been key to such efforts. Innovating to help the most disadvantaged access financing and small and medium-sized enterprise credits have also been vital.

5. Several countries have taken **comprehensive approaches** to various forms of discrimination, particularly related to gender and gender-based violence.
6. Partnerships, including with the private sector and financing institutions, have played a **critical role in fostering creative solutions**. These experiences provide grounds for optimism.
7. Responses to the COVID-19 crisis must be centred on the well-being of people, empowering them and advancing equality.
8. Driving change in the **people-environment nexus** to protect the health of people and natural resources is key to a future that does not repeat the crisis we are in today.

Examples that need to be adopted by all countries:

1. Several countries in Asia and the Pacific are developing ambitious new strategies for **green recovery and inclusive approaches to development**.
2. **South Korea** recently announced a New Deal based on two central pillars: **digitisation and decarbonisation**.
3. Many countries in the Pacific are **focusing on “blue recovery,”** seizing the opportunity to promote more sustainable approaches to fisheries management.
4. India recently announced operating the **largest solar power plant in the region**. China is creating more jobs in the renewable energy sector than in fossil fuel industries.
5. **Clean Fuel: India introduces BS-VI petrol and diesel**
6. Delhi will be the first city to leapfrog from BS-IV to BS-VI. 13 major cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, etc. will make the shift from 1st Jan 2019. The rest of the country also shifted from April 2020.
7. **Climate Change:** To reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 33 to 35 percent by 2030 from 2005 level.
8. To achieve about 40 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030, with the help of transfer of technology and low-cost international finance, including from Green Climate Fund.
9. To create an **additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent** through **additional forest and tree cover by 2030**.

Conclusion: A revolution needed:

- We need a **revolution in policy mindset and practice**.
- Inclusive and accountable governance systems, adaptive institutions with resilience to future shocks, universal social protection and health insurance, and stronger digital infrastructure are part of the transformations needed.
- Institutions such as the United Nations and Asian Development Bank have **mobilised to support a shared response to the crisis**.
- Now it is vital that we enable countries **to secure the support** they need to go beyond, to achieve the SDGs.

5. In reverse gear: on draft EIA notification

Background for the present Environment Impact Assessment (EIA):

- A signatory to the **Stockholm Declaration (1972) on Environment**, India enacted laws to control water (1974) and air (1981) pollution soon after. But it was only after the Bhopal gas leak disaster in 1984 that the country legislated an umbrella Act for environmental protection in 1986.
- Under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, **India notified its first EIA norms** in 1994, setting in place a legal framework for regulating activities that access, utilise, and affect (pollute) natural resources. Every development project has been required to go through the EIA process for obtaining prior environmental clearance ever since.

- The 1994 EIA notification was replaced with a **modified draft in 2006**. Earlier this year, the government redrafted it again to incorporate the amendments and relevant court orders issued since 2006, and to make the EIA “process more transparent and expedient.”

Context:

- The Union Ministry of Environment has been in the spotlight on more than one occasion during the pandemic, as it worked to push through retrograde environmental decisions in an atmosphere of general paralysis.
- In April, Environment Minister used a virtual conference to ensure that the **National Board for Wildlife’s Standing Committee** stamped its approval on several projects, with serious implications for conservation.
- He now wants to hurriedly make a fundamental change to the process of project approvals, by introducing a new Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification.



What is Environment Impact Assessment (EIA)?

- Environmental Impact Assessment or EIA is the process or study which predicts the effect of a proposed industrial/infrastructural project on the environment.
- It prevents the proposed activity/project from being approved without proper oversight or taking adverse consequences into account.

Importance of EIA:

1. EIA **links environment with development** for environmentally safe and sustainable development.
2. EIA provides a **cost-effective method** to eliminate or minimize the adverse impact of developmental projects.
3. EIA enables the decision makers to analyse the effect of developmental activities on the environment well before the developmental project is implemented.
4. EIA encourages the **adaptation of mitigation strategies** in the developmental plan.
5. EIA makes sure that the **developmental plan** is environmentally sound and within the limits of the capacity of assimilation and regeneration of the ecosystem.

Why is India's new EIA draft problematic?

1. India's new EIA draft has been **widely criticised** for its problematic changes in rules. Experts say most of the provisions in the new draft of EIA proves to be a regressive departure from the earlier version.
2. The 2020 draft offers no remedy for the political and bureaucratic stronghold on the EIA process, and thereby on industries.
3. Instead, it proposes to bolster the **government's discretionary power while limiting public engagement** in safeguarding the environment.
4. While projects concerning **national defence and security** are naturally considered strategic, the government gets to **decide on the "strategic" tag** for other projects.
5. The 2020 draft says no information on "such projects shall be placed in the public domain". This opens a window for summary clearance for any project deemed strategic without having to explain why.
6. Additionally, the new draft exempts a long list of projects from public consultation.
7. For example, linear projects such as roads and pipelines in border areas will not require any public hearing. The 'border area' is defined as "area falling within 100 kilometres aerial distance from the Line of Actual Control with bordering countries of India."
8. That would cover much of the Northeast, the repository of the country's richest biodiversity.

Criticism to the Draft:

Now in draft, it seeks to replace the existing EIA notification of 2006:

1. The proposed provisions show that the Ministry has gone to great lengths to reduce or even remove public participation, and by extension independent expert opinion, from the **process of granting environmental clearances**; public reporting of violations may also not be taken cognisance of.
2. **Section 26** provides a **list of projects** that would **not attract environmental clearance or permission**, including coal mining and seismic surveys for oil, methane and shale gas on some lands.
3. **Section 14** provides **exemption for these and some other projects from public consultation**, also limiting the scope of public involvement to the districts concerned, in the case of national parks and sanctuaries where pipeline infrastructure will pass. Roads and highways get liberal concessions.
4. Further, it retains the clause that if a public agency or authority considers the local situation not conducive to participation by citizens, the *public consultation need not include a public hearing*.
5. In spite of the far-reaching nature of its proposed actions, the Centre has displayed unseemly haste to get them in place and government has not aided credibility by trying to shut down public responses to the draft early. It took a Delhi High Court order to extend the deadline to August 11.
6. The exercise has been further muddled by the mysterious blocking of some activist websites calling for the EIA proposal to be dropped, and demanding a **new approach towards conserving natural resources for future generations**.

Conclusion:

- **A study of coal mining clearances** shows that 4,302 hectares of forest were diverted during 2014-18, favouring extraction over conservation.
- **Grow now, sustain later should not be the policy**, as the notion is dangerously tilted against the concept of sustainable development.
- COVID-19 has powerfully demonstrated the **value of nature for well-being**: of lost forests and captured wildlife bringing virus reservoirs closer to humans and foul air destroying their health.
- While there might be a case for some changes, much of the proposed EIA system can only make things worse, and should not be pushed through.
- The ministry, instead of reducing the time for public consultation, should **focus on ensuring access to information as well as awareness** about the public hearing and its impact upon the whole EIA process.
- In order to improve ease of doing business, the government should bring down the average delay of 238 days in granting environmental clearance, that emanates from bureaucratic delays and complex laws.

6. Lessons from a pandemic: Urgency for climate action

Context:

- Climate change is a **slow pandemic** itself that in years to come will cost human lives so we can learn a lesson from this particular pandemic and devise a future which is sustainable in equal parts for humans and environment and wildlife.
- The repeated outbreak of pandemics like SARS, MERS, Ebola is a result of climate change, desertification, loss of biodiversity, and illegal trading of wildlife.
- In order to successfully avert such a **crisis in the future**, we have to respect **nature and biodiversity**.
- Scholarly work and viral videos of prophetic philanthropists have warned us of the next pandemic after the **Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak** in 2002. The spread of the **novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19)** across the world has demonstrated the foresight of experts.
- Much like the claimed behaviour of an ostrich burying its head underground in the face of risk, we have demonstrated our capacity as a society to **ignore major risks** and their hefty price tags to *focus on short-term economic security*.

Climate Change and Pandemic:

- Even with differences such as timescale of impact, we need to understand how broader similarities between the **pandemic and climate change** offer a glimpse of a future risk by climate change.
- We **focus on the pandemic and climate change** even though the crises that really resonate with us are **global supply chains disruptions** and shocks to demand which in turn have their own knock-on effects such as **on food security**.
- An erratic shift of warming temperature in Indian Ocean over the last few years led to unusual amounts of rainfall in west Asia.
- This created favourable conditions for an **explosion in the population of locusts**, which in turn affected agricultural output in East Africa, Pakistan, India, etc.
- The same shift of **warming temperatures affects wind movement patterns** and prolonged the **2019 wildfires in Australia**.

Climate change also have a major link of spreading Pandemic:

- In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see **how curtailment of civilian movement** created a demand shock for oil, inducing a price crash of West Texas intermediate which in turn aggravated stock market decline.
- Impacts of the same transcend national boundaries, exactly in the case of **climate change-induced risks**.

How Climate Change can be Devastating for Cities

EXTREME HEAT Because of pollution and heat from buildings, cities are usually at a higher temperature than rural areas. Recent studies show that a global increase of temperature of 2 degrees can result in a temperature increase of 4-5 degrees in the cities

FLOODING When added to poorly designed infrastructure, heavy rains can cause serious and life-threatening floods

DROUGHT Because of the higher temperature and pollution, cities are likely to get less frequent rainfall. This can lead to droughts, with long gaps between heavy spells of rains. So future cities can be severely water-stressed

DISEASE OUTBREAKS Increase in heat can create conditions for growth of bacteria, virus and other parasites. Frequent flooding can help mosquitoes and other insects to breed, increasing probability of disease outbreaks

3. The calls to **decarbonise global infrastructure** is timely, especially in developing countries like India and China, which carry much of the **world's human burden** and have the **least capacity for investing in green technology**.
4. **The current pandemic can cost us up to \$9 trillion**. Experts claim that an additional investment of 10 per cent on the global health budget to improve pandemic preparedness and research could have helped us avert such a disaster.
5. If development investments focus on **short-term optimum system performance** instead of **long-term resiliency**, we can see how adversely and exponentially this impacts society and economy.
6. We need to have **long-term resilience solutions** at the core of planning if we are to, at the very least, **reduce our risk from climate change and sustainability**.
7. In this, we can clearly see how **both a pandemic and climate change** are physical shocks that act as **risk multipliers** and have knock-on effects on the overall systems which help in the **survival of eight billion humans on Earth**.

Climate Change will be Future Pandemic across the globe:

- Moreover, failure to act over climate change also complements the risk of future pandemics.
- Rising land temperatures (forming urban heat islands) increases the probabilities of infectious disease spread such as dengue.
- The risk of pandemics and epidemics is, thus, not only restricted to existing diseases but also more dangerous pathogens of the past which lay in melting permafrost.
- There is an eagerness to get the developmental engine back and running. The lack of fiscal capacity to **fund or sustain investments in green energy**, however, means **short-term gains** in limiting global carbon dioxide emissions achieved during the recent lockdowns will be **quickly lost on return to normalcy**.

The same thing happened right after the 2008 financial crisis:

- Climate change may indirectly affect the COVID-19 response, as it undermines environmental determinants of health, and places additional stress on health systems.
- More generally, most emerging infectious diseases, and almost all recent pandemics, originate in wildlife, and there is evidence that increasing human pressure on the natural environment may drive disease emergence.
- Strengthening health systems, improved surveillance of infectious disease in wildlife, livestock and humans, and greater protection of biodiversity and the natural environment, should **reduce the risks of future outbreaks of other new diseases**.
- At the current pace of **new renewable energy capacity addition**, India will need to add nearly 30 gigawatts renewable energy in the next three years to achieve its 2022 Renewable Energy commitments.
- Even though global informal alliances called for the **green stimulus** to be a part of economic recovery programs in the post-COVID-19 era, not much would be done in India and other developing countries when **millions face unemployment and food scarcity**.

Have measures to contain COVID-19 reduced air pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases?

1. Air pollution is a **serious health risk**. It kills approximately **7 million people every year** and is responsible for one third of all deaths from stroke, lung cancer and heart disease.
2. **Over 90% of the global population** lives in places where the WHO outdoor air quality guideline levels are not met, and about two-thirds of this exposure is caused by burning of fossil fuels, which also drives climate change.
3. Efforts to control COVID-19 transmission have reduced economic activity and led to temporary improvements in air quality in some areas.

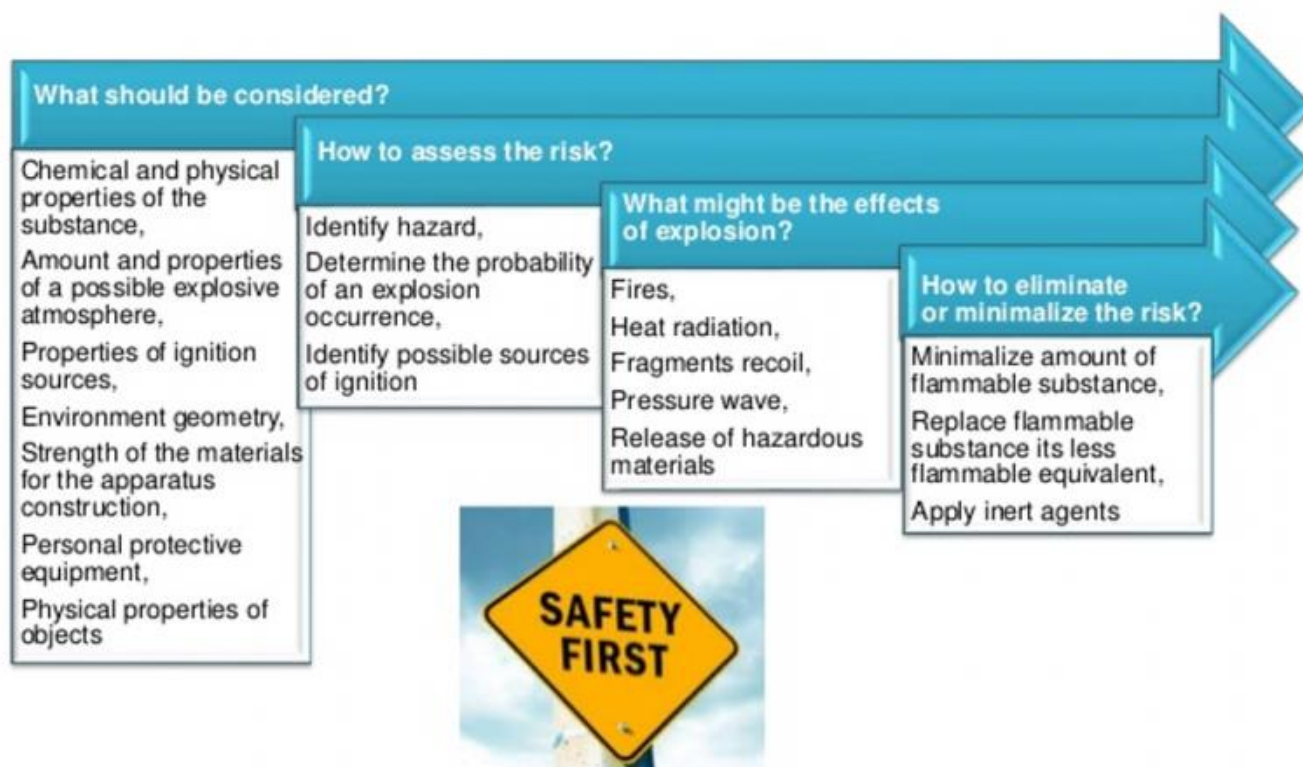
4. In contrast, as carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that drive climate change persist for a long time in the atmosphere, temporary emissions reductions only have a limited effect on atmospheric concentrations.
5. Carbon dioxide levels at observing stations around the world in the first months of 2020 have been higher than in 2019.
6. Environmental improvements resulting from the COVID-19 response may be reversed by a **rapid expansion of polluting economic activities** once the measures have ended, unless there is a clear focus to promote equity, environmental health, around a just transition to a green economy.
7. Any **short-term environmental benefits** as a result of COVID-19 come at an unacceptable human and economic cost, and are ***no substitute for planned and sustained action on air quality and climate.***

Conclusion:

- Recent debates on the **Environmental Impact Assessment Draft 2020** have shown that the government can thoroughly **disregard environmental consequences of unsustainable growth** in an effort to stimulate the economy.
- Remedies for climate change must be introduced in our efforts to combat the current pandemic and government stimulus should be **channelled to zero-carbon infrastructure projects.**
- This will not only help us avert the next big disaster for which risk conditions are being actively met by **changing climatic risk conditions**, but also help ***create more jobs in the green industry*** to provide **long-term resilience** in our built environment.

7. Lax on safety: On Neyveli and Visakhapatnam disasters

EXPLOSION PREVENTION and PROTECTION



Context:

- At least six people were killed and 17 injured in a boiler blast at **Neyveli Thermal Power Station in Tamil Nadu**.
- The blast occurred in the fifth unit of the second station as workers were resuming work.
- Two deadly industrial disasters, in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, leading to the loss of at least eight lives and causing serious injuries to many, once again **underscore the value of safety protocols**.
- In a boiler blast at the Neyveli thermal power station, six people were killed and a dozen workers suffered severe burns, while a toxic chemical leak at a pharmaceutical plant in Visakhapatnam led to two deaths immediately.

Recent incidents of Industrial Disasters reflects poor standards in reality:

- In a boiler blast at the Neyveli thermal power station, they are regulated strictly under the Indian Boilers Act, at least on paper.
- The terrible **consequences of lax boiler safety** were evident three years ago in Rae Bareilly, when a blast at an NTPC power plant killed a few dozen people.
- But States have **clearly not internalised a culture of zero tolerance to boiler accidents**.
- The gas leak in Visakhapatnam apparently **involving benzimidazole**, a chemical used in pharmaceuticals, **raises questions on maintenance and operational procedures**.
- The probe into how vapours of a stable but acutely toxic chemical escaped should lead to an upgrade to safety protocols.
- In the Neyveli incident, there is a suggestion that the boiler was not in operation as it had tripped and was in the **process of being revived**.
- Occupational safety demands that boilers are operated by trained personnel, but some of those on the ground have been described as **contract employees**. It will take an **independent probe** to determine whether cost calculations guided staffing decisions in such a hazardous sector.

About the Indian Boilers Act, 1923:

- This had enacted with the objective to provide **mainly for the safety of life and Property of persons** from the danger of explosions of steam boilers and for achieving uniformity in registration and inspection during operation and maintenance of boilers in India.

Cause for concern now:

- According to the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**, in the recent past, over 130 significant chemical accidents have been reported in the country, which have resulted in 259 deaths and caused major injuries to more than 560 people.
- There are over 1861 Major Accident Hazard (MAH) units spread across 301 districts and 25 states and three Union Territories in all zones of the country.
- Further, there are **thousands of registered and hazardous factories** and **unorganised sectors** dealing with numerous ranges of hazardous material posing serious and complex levels of disaster risks.

Steps to Prevent Industrial disasters:

1. Proper safety measures:

- The proper safety measures should be adopted to avoid accidents Government also provides guidelines for **enacting measures for checking accidents**, these should be properly followed.

2. Proper selection:

- Any wrong selection of workers will create problems later on. Sometime employees are accident prone, they may not be properly suitable for the particular jobs. So, the **selection of employees** should be on the basis of properly devised tests so that their suitability for jobs is determined.

3. Safety conscious:

- The employees should be **made conscious of various safety measures** to be followed. There should be proper working slogans and advises to the worker for making them conscious.

4. Enforcement of discipline:

- Disciplinary action** should be taken against those who flout safety measures. There may be negative punishments like warnings, lay off, terminations of workers.

5. Incentives:

- Workers should be given **various incentives for maintaining safety**. There may also be safety contrasts among workers. Those who follow safety instructions properly should be given monetary and non-monetary incentives.

6. Safety committees:

- Safety measures are in the interest of both employers. There should be committees consisting of representatives of workers and employees for devising and enforcing safety programmes.

7. Proper maintenance of machines, equipment and infrastructural facilities:

- Accidents may occur on account of the **fault in machines or equipment**. There should be proper maintenance of machines. These should be **regularly checked** and frequently inspected by engineering

8. Safety training:

- The workers should be given training regarding safety measures. They should know the hazards of the machines, the **areas of accident proneness** and the good working possible precautions in case of some accident.
 - 1) **Strict protocols**: Strict protocols and standard operating procedures to be followed under all circumstances.
 - 2) **Stringent norms**: Proper norms and stringent punishment in case of mishandling of equipment's or damages caused during production process.
 - 3) **Emergency planning**: Disaster is a next step of accident, so proper training to deal with any accidents and emergency situations.

Conclusion:

- These and two other recent disasters, also at a Neyveli power plant and the LG Polymers factory in the Visakhapatnam area, have come at a stressful time when India is trying to find its feet in the midst of the pandemic.
- Without meticulous care**, boilers are dangerous pieces of equipment. High-pressure and superheated steam make for a lethal combination, if their release mechanism is not kept in good order, and there is an explosion.

- The response of the Centre and States to industrial accidents is usually to stem public outrage by **announcing compensation for victims**.
- A **transparent inquiry** that leads to a **fixing of responsibility and reform** is a **low priority**. This culture must change.
- Such accidents are **mostly preventable**, and occur rarely in the industrialised world, because of impeccable attention to safety. **India's aspirations to industrialise should be founded on safety**.

8. What happened to India's flood management plan?

Introduction:

- As floods cause **major damage to life and property every year**, it is time the central and the state governments prepare a **long-term plan** that goes beyond piecemeal measures like building embankments and dredging to control floods.
- Also, there is a **need for an integrated basin management plan** that brings all the river-basin sharing countries as well Indian states on board.
- At least 43 years after India's first and last commission on floods was constituted, there is no national-level flood control authority in the country so far.
- **Rashtriya Barh Ayog (RBA)**, or the **National Flood Commission**, was set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in 1976, **to study India's flood-control measures** after the projects launched under the National Flood Control Programme of 1954 failed to achieve much success.



Context:

- Recently, **floods in Assam and other north-eastern states** have caused devastation of life and property, which is an annual problem in the region.
- However, floods are not restricted to North-eastern India, rather it affects many other areas in the country.
- Apart from natural factors like incessant and heavy rainfall during the monsoon, there are man-made factors that contribute to floods in India.
- India is highly vulnerable, as most of its geographical area is prone to annual flooding.
- The high losses and damages due to floods show the poor adaptation and **mitigation status of India** and inadequacy in disaster management and preparedness.
- Thus, there is a need for an **Integrated flood management system**.

In 1980, the National Flood Commission made 207 recommendations and four broad observations.

- 1) First, it said there was **no increase in rainfall in India** and, thus, the increase in floods was due to **anthropogenic factors** such as deforestation, drainage congestion and badly planned development works.
- 2) Second, it questioned the effectiveness of the methods adopted to control floods, such as embankments and reservoirs, and suggested that the construction of these structures be halted till their efficacy was assessed.

However, it did say that **embankments could be constructed in areas** where they were effective.

- 3) Third, it said there has to be **consolidated efforts** among the states and the Centre to take up research and policy initiatives to control floods.
- 4) Fourth, it recommended a **dynamic strategy** to cope with the changing nature of floods. An analysis of the report suggested that the problem began with the methods of **estimating flood-prone areas of the country**.

An accurate estimate is crucial for framing flood management programmes:

1. The **National Flood Commission** estimated that the total area vulnerable to floods in 1980 was around 40 million hectares.
2. The areas where protection works failed were then subtracted from the total. It is, however, a flawed methodology and National Flood Commission itself acknowledges it.
3. It is clear that while the **maximum area flooded in any one year** may broadly indicate the degree of the flood problem in a state, it does not strictly indicate the area liable to floods as different areas may be flooded in different years.
4. There is another problem. The **very definition of flood-prone area** does not reflect the effectiveness of the flood management works undertaken.
5. The National Flood Commission report also recognised the **need for timely evaluation of flood management projects**.
6. It entrusted state irrigation and flood control departments, CWC, Ganga Flood Control Commission and the Brahmaputra Board with the task of adopting or discarding them on the basis of their performance. But this has not been the case.
7. Even when flood management projects are evaluated, the reports are not credible.
8. Moreover, the evaluation is generally done by departments that **undertake flood-control projects**. A major problem is the inaction on recommendations of evaluation reports.
9. For instance, in 1978, RBA asked the programme evaluation organisation of the erstwhile Planning Commission to review the Kosi embankments.
10. The study, published in 1979, concluded that embankments had, in fact, enhanced the flood problem. But the embankments were raised by two metres in 1987-88, and remain aggravate the flood situation in Bihar.

A call for integrated flood management:

According to the audit report on “Schemes for Flood Control and Flood Forecasting” 2017 by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), the major issues with flood management in India are:

1. Key recommendations of Rashtriya Barh Ayog such as scientific assessment of flood prone areas and enactment of Flood Plain Zoning Act are not materialised
2. **Poor flood forecasting system:** Flood forecasting network of the CWC is not sufficient to cover the country adequately. Further, most of the existing flood forecasting stations are not operational.
3. **Poor flood risk mapping:** A task force set up by the Central Water Commission (CWC) in 2006 did not complete the task of flood risk mapping. Further, the Vulnerability Atlas of India has stopped flood zonation. Flood damage assessments not done adequately.
4. **Delays in completion of projects** under the flood management programmes primarily due to shortfall of Centre’s assistance.
5. **Flood management works** are not taken up in an **integrated manner**.
6. Most of the large dams in India do **not have disaster management plans**— only 7% of total large dams in the country have emergency action plans/disaster management plans.

Indian reservoirs brimming as monsoon advances:

1. Major reservoirs in India are **already brimming** and their storage level is much more than what it was this time in 2019, even as the southwest monsoon advances over India.

2. Reservoirs in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha have already recorded 100 per cent or more departure from normal storage.
3. This also raises fears of floods caused by these reservoirs if the water levels are not managed efficiently.
4. Most river basins monitored by CWC also have better-than-normal storage. For instance, live storage of the Ganga, Narmada, Sabarmati, Tapi, Mahanadi and Godavari is over 100 per cent more than the average of the last 10 years.
5. Rivers in Bihar, where flood alerts have been issued, are flowing in 'severe situation', according to the CWC flood forecast and many show a 'rising' trend.
6. The position of some important dams, that have been responsible for inducing floods in the recent past due to mismanagement of water levels, was also worrisome.

Conclusion: Measures to prevent Urban Flooding:

- **Early Warning System and Communication:** Dissemination of flood warnings must be carried out, using a wide range of latest technologies.

This would help in giving real time data where traditional systems fail.

- **Design and Management of Urban Drainage System:** Proper management of drainage system is necessary to ensure that the water does not get stored in one place.
- **Solid waste increases hydraulic roughness,** causes blockage and generally reduces flow capacity. These drains need to be cleaned on a regular basis to permit free flow of water.
- **Rainwater Harvesting:** Due to urbanisation, groundwater recharge has decreased and the peak runoff from rainfall and consequent flooding has increased.

It will serve the twin purposes of lowering the peak runoff and raising the ground water table. Many municipal corporations in India have already made **rainwater harvesting compulsory**.

- **Conservation of Water Bodies:** Urban water bodies like lakes, tanks and ponds also play a very important role in the management of urban flooding by reducing the stormwater run-off by capturing it.

9. Reform with caution: On criminal laws reform

Looking back

The Malimath Committee report in 2003 made 158 recommendations on crime investigation and punishment, among others

Key recommendations

- Confessions made before a Superintendent of Police rank officer be admitted as evidence in a court of law
- Standard of 'proof beyond reasonable doubt' followed in criminal cases be done away with
- Stringent punishment needed for false registration of cases



Justice V.S. Malimath

Context: Committee on Criminal Law Reform:

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has constituted a national level **committee for reform in criminal law**.
- There have been several attempts in recent decades to overhaul the body of criminal law, comprising the Indian Penal Code of 1860 vintage, the Code of Criminal Procedure that was rewritten in 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act that dates back to 1872.
- However, **comprehensive legal reform** is something that requires careful consideration and a **good deal of deliberation**.

Background of Criminal Justice System:

- The criminal justice system is a replica of the British colonial jurisprudence, which was designed with the purpose of ruling the nation and not serving the citizens.
- The codification of criminal laws in India was done during the British rule, which more or less remains the same even in the 21st century.
- **Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay** is said to be the chief architect of **codifications of criminal laws in India**.
- Criminal law in India is governed by Indian Penal Code, 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and Indian Evidence Act, 1872, etc.
- The purpose of the criminal justice system was to protect the rights of the innocents and punish the guilty, but nowadays the system has become a tool of harassment of common people.
- According to **Economic Survey 2018-19**, there are about **3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system**, especially in district and subordinate courts, which leads to actualisation of the maxim **"Justice delayed is justice denied."**

Criminal justice system: need of both substantive and procedural:

1. The criminal justice system- both substantive and procedural- are replica of the British colonial jurisprudence, which were designed with the purpose of ruling the nation. Therefore, the relevance of these 19th century laws is debatable in the 21st century.
2. The construction of new offences and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be **guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence** which have substantially altered in the past four decades.
3. The **discretion of judges** in deciding the quantum and nature of sentence differently for crimes of the same nature should be **based on principles of judicial precedence**.
4. Criminal law is considered to be the most apparent expression of the relationship between a state and its citizens. Therefore, any revision to the CJSI needs to be done while keeping several principles in mind.
5. Criminal justice is in a **state of policy ambiguity**. India needs to draft a clear policy that should inform the changes to be **envisaged in the IPC or CrPC**.
6. All reforms will be in vain unless simultaneous improvements are made in the **police, prosecution, judiciary and in prisons**.
7. Our policy makers need to focus on **reformatory justice** in order to bring all around peace in the society.

Concerns by Jurists, legal experts and activists:

1. The formation of a '**Committee for the Reform of Criminal Laws**' by the Union Home Ministry with an apparently short time frame and limited scope for public consultation has caused considerable disquiet among jurists, lawyers and those concerned with the state of criminal justice in the country.
2. Few would disagree with the idea that the current laws governing crime, investigation and trial require meaningful reform.
3. One criticism against the latest Committee is that it has **begun its work in the midst of a pandemic**. This may not be the ideal time for wide consultations.

4. Activists and lawyers functioning in the hinterland may be at a particular disadvantage in formulating their opinions.
5. The panel's mandate appears quite broad: "to recommend reforms in the criminal laws of the country in a **principled, effective, and efficient manner** which ensures the **safety and security** of the individual, the community and the nation; and which **prioritises the constitutional values of justice, dignity and the inherent worth of the individual.**"
6. This is vague and open to multiple interpretations. It is also not clear **why the Law Commission has not been vested with this task.**
7. The **lack of diversity** in what is an all-male, **Delhi-based committee** has also been adversely commented upon.
8. In 2003, the **Justice V.S. Malimath Committee on reforms in the criminal justice system** had come up with some far-reaching suggestions, some of which became part of changes in criminal law.
9. However, it also **attracted criticism** over the suggestion that the **standard of evidence** be **reduced from "beyond reasonable doubt" to "clear and convincing"**.
10. The **Justice Verma panel** came up with a **comprehensive and progressive report on reforms** needed in laws concerning crimes **against women in 2013** in barely one month, but its speed was probably due to the **limited mandate** it had.

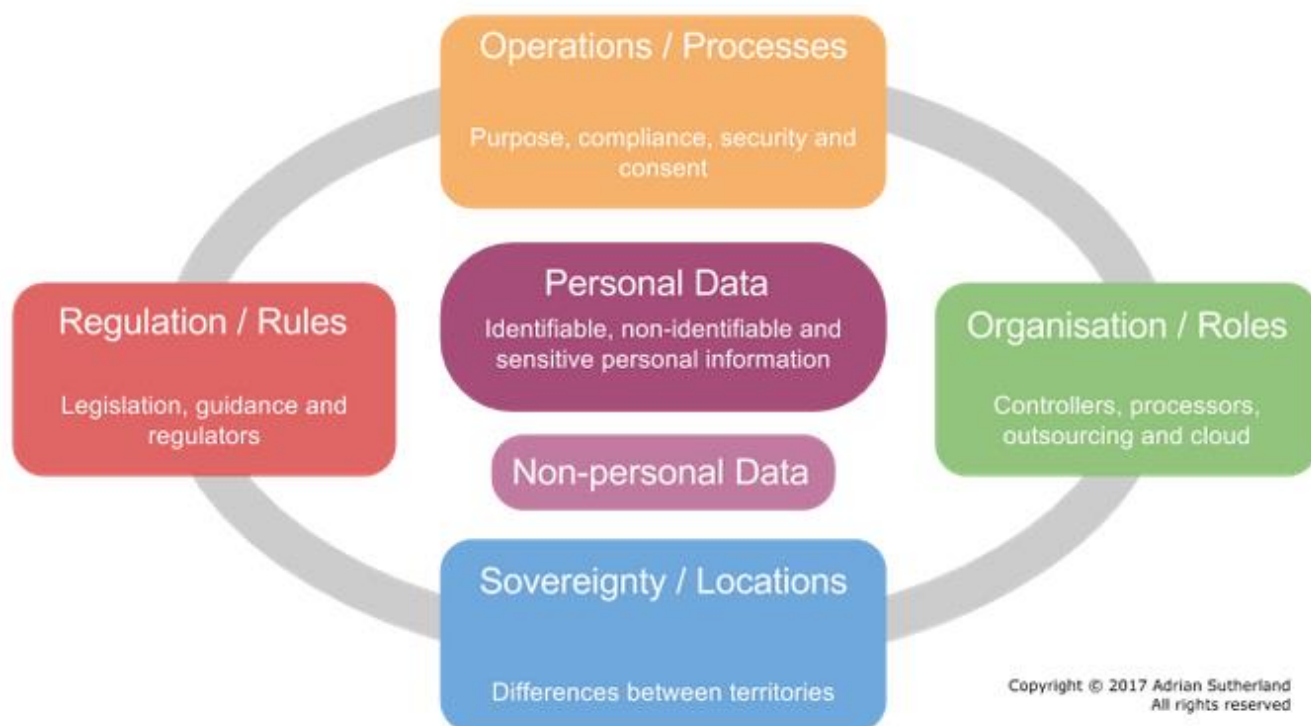
Reforms that need to be included are:

1. The committee must cover a **large and diverse landscape of 'offences'** and criminal procedure to craft a criminal law system that is truly in tune with the times. For example, Contempt of Court, marital rape, acid attacks, hate crimes etc
2. Government should **not give in to populist demands** and run the risk of excessive policing and over-criminalising
3. **Death Penalty needs a legislative approach** and not just passing the buck to the judiciary.
4. On procedural aspects of criminal law, there is a **need to harmonise the statute books with court rulings**
5. Victim who are often on the margins of the justice process should not be burdened with institutional delays
6. **Accountability**, above all, must guide the balance between the rights of the citizen and imperatives of state.

Conclusion:

- Criminal justice is directionless and in a state of policy ambiguity. India needs to **draft a clear policy** that should inform the changes to be envisaged in the IPC or CrPC.
- Another systemic error is that of non-adherence to a particular theory of punishment. The criminal justice system often swings between the three theories of deterrence, retribution and reformation depending on its convenience.
- If at all **criminal law is to be reformed**, there should be a **genuine attempt** to reach a wide consensus on ways to speed up trials, protect witnesses, address the travails of victims, improve investigative mechanisms and, most importantly, eliminate torture.
- An impression should not gain ground that **wide-ranging changes** are sought to be made within a **short time frame** and **based on limited inputs** from the public. **Reform is best achieved through a cautious and inclusive approach.**

10. Towards robust data regulation



Context:

- A **government committee** headed by Infosys co-founder **Kris Gopalakrishnan** has suggested that **non-personal data generated in the country** be allowed to be harnessed by various domestic companies and entities.
- The nine-member committee, while releasing the **draft report**, has kept time till **August 13** for the **public to send suggestions**.
- It has also suggested **setting up of a new authority** which would be empowered to monitor the use and mining of such non-personal data.

What is non-personal data?

- In its most basic form, **non-personal data** is any set of data which does not contain personally identifiable information.
- This in essence means that no individual or living person can be identified by looking at such data.
- For example, while order details collected by a food delivery service will have the name, age, gender, and other contact information of an individual, it will become non-personal data if the identifiers such as name and contact information are taken out.
- The government committee, which submitted its report has classified non-personal data into **three main categories**, namely public non-personal data, community non-personal data and private non-personal data.
- Depending on the source of the data and whether it is anonymised in a way that no individual can be re-identified from the data set, the three categories have been divided.

Regulation of Non-personal data (NPD):

- For a country that does not have a personal data protection bill, the setting up of a committee **to regulate non-personal data seems premature**.

- However, there is global realisation that data should be unlocked in public interest beyond the sole service of commercial interests of a few large companies.
- There is also recognition that data, in many cases, are not just a subject of individual decision-making but that of **communities**, such as in the case of **ecological information**.
- Therefore, it is critical that communities are empowered to exercise some control over how the data are used.

How sensitive can non-personal data be?

- Unlike personal data, which contains explicit information about a person's name, age, gender, sexual orientation, biometrics and other genetic details, non-personal data is **more likely to be in an anonymised form**.
- However, in **certain categories** such as data related to national security or strategic interests such as locations of government laboratories or research facilities, even if provided in anonymised form can be dangerous.
- Similarly, even if the data is about the **health of a community or a group of communities**, though it may be in anonymised form, it can **still be dangerous**, the committee opined.
- Possibilities of such harm are obviously much higher if the original personal data is of a sensitive nature.
- Therefore, the non-personal data arising from **such sensitive personal data** may be considered as sensitive non-personal data.

Key stakeholders in the regulation of Non-personal data:

To enable a **robust regulation of NPD**, the report defines **key stakeholders** for the ecosystem.

1. First are **data principals**, who/ which can be individuals, companies or communities.
2. The **roles and rights** of individuals and companies in the context of data governance are well understood. However, the idea of communities as data principals is introduced ambiguously by the report.
3. While it provides examples of what might constitute a community, e.g. citizen groups in neighbourhoods, there is **little clarity on the rights and functions of the community**.
4. The report **does not problematise the ways** in which communities translate offline inequalities and power structures to data rights.
5. There are examples in **indigenous data governance**, which imagine collective rights and community-personhood on data-related issues, which may have found useful mention here.
6. **Next are data custodians**, who undertake collection, storage, processing, and use of data in a manner that is in the best interest of the data principal.
7. The **details in this section are fuzzy**, it is **not specified** if the data custodian can be the government or just private companies, or what best interest is, especially when several already vague and possibly conflicting principal communities are involved. It is also not clear how communities engage with the custodian.
8. Further suggestion that **data custodians can potentially monetise the data** they hold is especially problematic as this presents a conflict of interest with those of the data principal communities.
9. Based on current literature, **data custodians can be interpreted as data stewards**, imagined in many cases as independent entities that intermediate with technology companies on behalf of communities, which they represent.

Global standards on non-personal data:

- In May 2019, the European Union came out with a regulation framework for the free flow of non-personal data in the European Union, in which it suggested that member states of the union would cooperate with each other when it came to data sharing.
- Such data, the EU had then ruled would be shared by member states without any hindrances, and that they must inform the "commission any draft act which introduces a **new data localisation requirement** or makes changes to an existing data localisation requirement".

- The regulation, however, had not defined what non-personal data constituted of, and had simply said all data which is not personal would be under the non-personal data category.
- In several other countries across the world, there are **no nationwide data protection laws**, whether for personal or non-personal data.

Areas that India's non-personal data draft miss:

1. Though the non-personal data draft is a pioneer in identifying the power, role, and usage of anonymised data, there are certain aspects such as **community non-personal data**, where the draft **could have been clearer**.
2. Non-personal data often constitutes **protected trade secrets** and often raises significant **privacy concerns**.
3. The paper proposes the nebulous concept of community data while failing to adequately provide for community rights.
4. Next, the report talks about **data trustees** as a way for communities to exercise data rights. Trustees can be governments, citizen groups, or universities.
5. However, the relationship between the **data principal communities and the trustees is not clear**.
6. The articulation of trustees **does not explain how "trust" is extended and fructified with the community**, and how trustees are empowered to act on behalf of the community.
7. The idea of trusteeship for data is being discussed globally — the principles of a legal trust and the fiduciary responsibility that come with it are critical.
8. Trustees, by definition, are bound by a duty of care and loyalty towards the principal and thus work in their best interests, negotiating on behalf of their data rights with technology companies and regulators. This thinking is not reflected in the report.

Trusts can hold data from multiple custodians and will be managed by public authority. The **power, composition and functions** of the **trust are not established**.

One possible way to simplify the ecosystem would be to consider data trusts as a type of custodian, such that fiduciary responsibilities can be extended, and trustees can represent the community and act on behalf of the data principals.

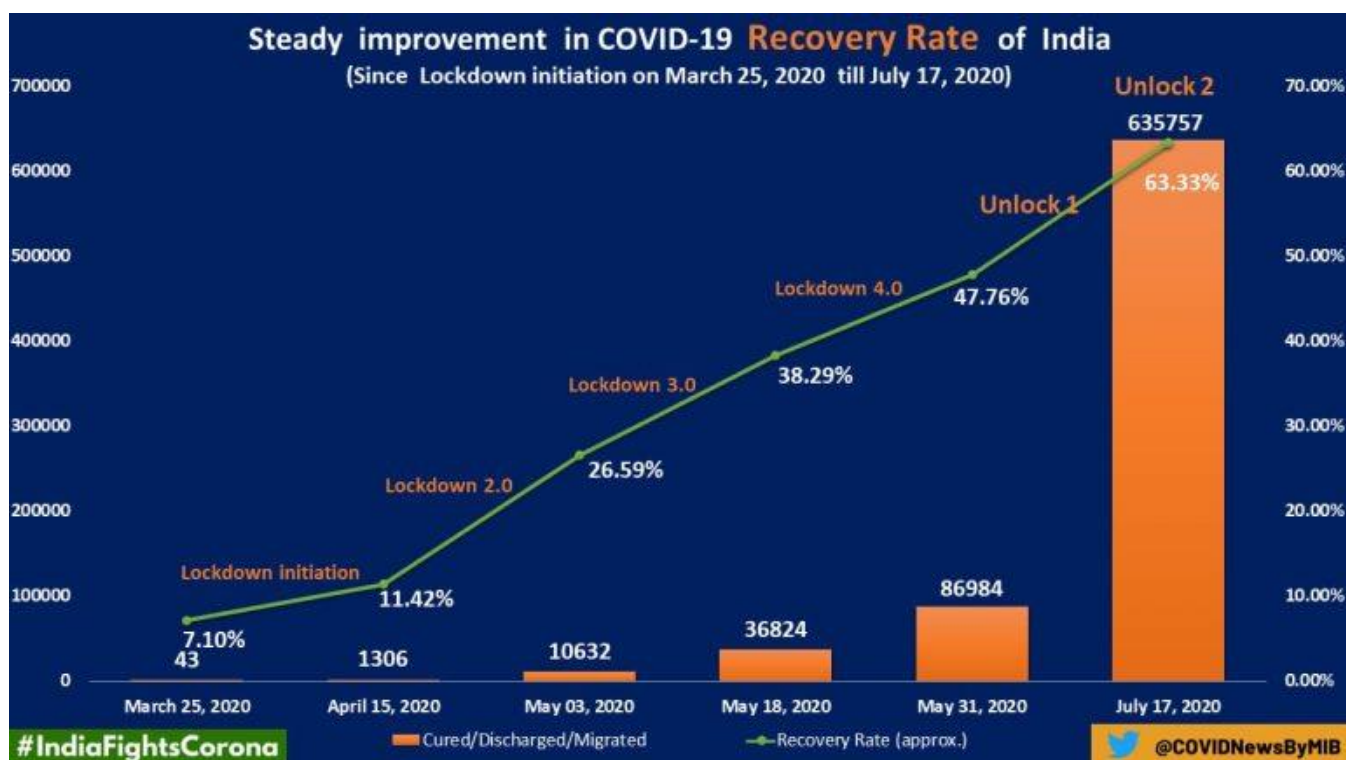
The committee should **organise broader consultations** to ensure that the **objective of unlocking data in public interest** and through collective consent does not end up creating structures that exacerbate the problems of the data economy and are susceptible to regulatory capture.

Conclusion:

- Finally, the report explains data trusts comprising specific rules and protocols for containing and sharing a given set of data.
- Regulation must be clear, and concise to provide certainty to its market participants, and must demarcate roles and responsibilities of participants in the regulatory framework.
- The report is unclear on these counts, and **requires public consultation and more deliberation**.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. How to stall COVID's march in rural India



Rural population in India:

- According to the **Census of India**, rural populations are comparatively older, placing them at a higher risk of contracting the COVID-19 infection.
- They also live **much farther from hospitals** than their urban or suburban counterparts and a majority of them list access to good medical care as a **major community problem**.
- As the current pandemic has stretched an **already overburdened** medical infrastructure, other healthcare services such as reproductive and child health, healthcare for the elderly and other curative services have taken a backseat.

Context:

- The country-wide lockdown imposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from March 25, 2020, impaired the lives of many urban migrants who lost their jobs overnight.
- With all modes of public transport** being suspended, urban migrants had no choice but to walk on foot to their native places. Journalists, called it a “gigantic movement in Indian history.”
- After many cities lurched under its calamitous impact, the novel coronavirus has unearthed a new hunting ground in rural areas.
- With several migrants returning to their native places, there has been a trend reversal.
- The rural areas of many districts are now reporting an upsurge in the number of confirmed cases of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).
- The World Health Organization's chief scientist, has also expressed her concern, stating that rural India is the next coronavirus hotbed.

Highest influx of migrants directly related to heavy spike in the number of cases:

- Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Odisha and Jharkhand, that are now witnessing a heavy spike in the number of cases, are the states that have received the highest influx of migrants.
- The **rural areas of Rajasthan and Karnataka** have also started to record an escalation in the number of cases.
- **Nearly 6.7 million migrants returned to 116 districts in six states** from urban centres, according to preliminary data compiled by the Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- Of them, about 4.4 million or two-thirds returned to 53 districts. Bihar topped the six states, with 2.36 million migrants returning to 32 districts, followed by Uttar Pradesh, with 1.748 million returning to 31 districts.

Dismal rural healthcare infrastructure:

1. The public healthcare infrastructure is **dismal in rural India**, characterised by a **chronic shortage** of medical professionals including doctors, nursing staff, paramedics as well as hospital beds and equipment.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a special challenge due to **inadequate testing and isolation facilities in rural India**.
3. Moreover, there are **high levels of non-communicable diseases** (for instance diabetes, hypertension, etc), infectious diseases (tuberculosis, diarrhoea, etc) and malnutrition in rural areas.
4. Healthcare services are quite distant for many villages in several districts, especially remote ones.
5. This is coupled with a **lack of transportation in rugged terrains** that may exclude many from seeking timely COVID-19 testing and treatment.

Solution: Strengthening the National Rural Health Mission:

1. Launched in 2005, the NRHM, now the part of National Health Mission, seeks to provide **effective health care to the rural population** by strengthening public health systems for efficient service delivery.
2. It seeks to provide **effective health care to vulnerable population groups** in rural areas by improving access, enabling community ownership and demand for services.
3. The pandemic presents an **opportunity** to realise the true potential of the existing National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and its associated budget allocation.
4. Expedient efforts for effective management of COVID-19 in rural India should be done under the broad umbrella of NRHM.
5. These efforts should be done in a **strategic manner** so as to **strengthen health infrastructure and service delivery mechanism** in the process.
6. Since more than 12 percent of India's rural population accessed PHCs or outreach health service delivery points, there is a need to rapidly **develop a robust referral system from PHCs to CHCs / rural hospitals** and the nearest COVID-19 testing and treatment facilities.
7. The strategy may include **clustering and increased coordination** among four-five CHCs / rural hospitals accessible by road to **strengthen testing outreach**, with one of them being the COVID-19 RT-PCR testing node.
8. Arrangements of RT-PCR testing kits, reagents and associated equipment for such CHCs identified for the purpose will be in interest of better management of COVID-19 in rural areas.
9. Training of health personnel in CHCs needs to be provided at the nearest COVID testing centres.
10. The rural population will greatly benefit if a vehicle from the nodal COVID-19 CHCs could visit the two nearby CHCs on one route for pre-defined timings on fixed days of the week to collect samples for RT-PCR tests.
11. On alternate days, the vehicle could cover the other one or two CHCs. There **needs to be coordination and a referral** and COVID-19 reporting mechanism in place **between PHCs and CHCs** about the testing day and time so that contacts of confirmed cases and suspected COVID-19 cases can be referred efficiently.

Way Forward: Decentralised governance:

- A **holistic approach** needs to be adopted by the administration if the spread of coronavirus to **rural areas** has to be curtailed.
- **Pre-planning and a decentralised administration**, with effective decision-making and implementation powers placed in the hands of the **Panchayats** is necessary.
- The **Gram Panchayats** should be equipped with **measures for handling breakouts**. Quarantine centres need to be established and managed efficiently, private and local doctors should be trained for COVID-19 handling and management.
- Adequate measures should also be in place to ensure that there is **no stigma and discrimination** against COVID-19 patients or their families.
- **Awareness campaigns** should be organised to increase awareness regarding self-care and sanitation facilities.

Conclusion:

- A recent study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology warns that **India** might be the **worst-affected nation** by coronavirus by the **end of winter of 2021**, with **nearly 0.287 million cases** surfacing every day in the country.
- If the cases keep increasing at the current rate and the spread of the infection to the **rural areas is not kept in check**, the above-mentioned forecasting might prove itself true and this **could prove disastrous** for India and its already-stretched healthcare system.
- If this is to be prevented, **strategic attempts to isolate the rural areas** as much as possible should be made and concerted efforts need to be put in place to ensure that rules are adhered to and healthcare facilities are provided.

2. What are the implications of the Delhi sero-survey findings?

Context:

- To estimate the **extent of infection in the community**, scientists at the National Centre for Disease Control, a Health Ministry body tasked with **monitoring epidemics**, conducted a **district-wise serological survey** across Delhi.
- Preliminary findings showed that 23.48% of Delhi's population had been exposed to the virus and that a large number of those infected were **asymptomatic**.

About Sero-Survey:

- A serological survey is done to **detect the presence of specific antibodies**, and is used to assess the prevalence of a disease in the population.
- The test indicates past infections (and which triggered an immune response), and is not used to detect active infections.
- Results of two different serological surveys, one in Delhi and the other in Mumbai, were announced.
- Both the surveys found the presence of novel Coronavirus-specific antibodies in slightly less than 25 per cent of those tested.
- This could mean that in either of these cities, there were chances that **about 25 per cent of the city's population** had already been infected by the virus, if we assume that the disease was uniformly spread in the population.

COVID-19 serological tests

Serological tests for SARS-CoV-2 can show a person has been exposed to the virus, but authorities are warning that such tests have limits to what they can tell us



A serological test looks at blood **serum**, the fluid part of plasma that is left after cells have coagulated



It tells us about the presence of **antibodies** which are made in response to specific virus **antigens**



Scientists are yet to confirm how effective SARS-CoV-2 antibodies or **immunoglobulins** are in protecting from a second infection

Main types of tests available or in development

Rapid diagnostic tests

Time to results
10-30 mins

How they work



Blood sample passes over a line that detects antibodies and changes colour

These tests can indicate the presence or absence of antibodies of interest but they can't tell us about the quantity of antibodies or how effective they are at stopping virus growth

Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays

Time to results
2-5 hours



Sample exposed to a plate coated with virus antigen

- ▶ Colour is added to react with antibodies that attach to antigen
- ▶ Intensity of colour indicates presence of antibodies

Both these tests can tell us about the quantity of antibodies present, but they cannot tell us how effective they are at stopping virus growth

Chemiluminescent immunoassays

Time to results
1-2 hours



Sample exposed to a plate coated with virus antigen

- ▶ Light-giving chemical added to react with antibodies that attach to antigen
- ▶ Intensity of light indicates presence of antibodies

Source: [centerforhealthsecurity.org/CDC.gov/medicinenet.com](https://www.cdc.gov/medicinenet.com)

© AFP

How was the Delhi sero-prevalence survey done?

1. Unlike the **real time RT-PCR** (reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) tests or antigen tests that scan for the presence of the coronavirus in the body, the **sero-prevalence survey** was designed to look for the **presence of antibodies**, produced **in response to the coronavirus**, in the blood.
2. On an average, antibodies can be **detected five days after an infection sets in**. The coronavirus, in general, **diminishes after 21 days**.
3. **Antibodies**, for a host of other viral infections, are normally expected to linger for many months and confer protection against fresh infections by the same virus.
4. However, it is still too early in the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 to know **how long the antibodies will last**.
5. According to health experts, because the actual virus withers away quickly, many of those infected show **mild symptoms**.
6. Antigen and PCR tests are often cumbersome to be widely deployed in the field and are not always the best way to estimate the spread of the virus.
7. After the Indian Council of Medical Research led a multi-institutional study in May to estimate national sero-prevalence using the **Kavach-ELISA antibody-detection kit**, developed and tested in India, the government decided to do a similar study across Delhi.

8. In June, the city was grappling with a high number of cases and several parts of the city were locked into containment zones.

What did the survey find?

1. Nearly 22,000 samples were collected from 11 districts. It emerged that on average, 23.48% of Delhi had been exposed to the virus.
2. A large number of those infected were asymptomatic. Like in all statistical surveys, extrapolating the results from a sliver of a population to an entire city comes with its own caveats.
3. Generally, those who commission such surveys report their findings in a peer-reviewed journal and detail, for instance, how accurate the test was in picking up infections and the error margins in extrapolating the results to a population.
4. No such details were made available, so the announcement that nearly a quarter of Delhi's 20 million population had been exposed to the virus is at best only suggestive.
5. A lot of the samples were collected from Delhi's densest pockets so the extent of variation of infection in less populated parts of Delhi is not known.
6. The Delhi government has said it will keep repeating these surveys at periodic intervals to gauge the spread of the infection.
7. The survey found that nearly eight of the 11 districts had a sero-prevalence exceeding 20%.
8. To the Delhi government, the fact that after six months of the global pandemic there was a 23% spread was indicative of the effect of lockdown and containment zone management. But the government also cautioned that the survey showed **77% of the population to be vulnerable to the infection**; therefore, measures such as masks, hygiene, social distancing ought to be strictly adhered to.
9. Another way to look at serology surveys is to compare the number of RT-PCR positive cases and the number of those who were infected as per their antibody profiles.
10. Thus, assuming that 50 lakh (or 25% as per this survey) were infected and comparing that to only about 100,000 who were confirmed positive, it appears that a PCR test caught only about 1 in 50 who are infected by the virus.
11. This undermines claims by the Delhi government of its ability to contain infection spread.
12. However, missing a sizeable proportion of those infected by the coronavirus is par for the course given that it spreads rapidly and leaves a large proportion of those afflicted with only mild (and frequently unreported) symptoms.

How reliable are serology surveys?

- While it is routine in epidemiology to deploy antibody tests to estimate the **prevalence of a disease**, the sheer speed of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and the global nature of the disease have complicated the matter.
- Generally, they take a while to develop and are tested in the field before being deployed in large numbers.
- This is **done to rule out errors** such as the test marking the wrong antibodies, or an inappropriate sample that does not represent a population being chosen.
- Such problems hindered an early plan by the ICMR to use China-manufactured antibody kits in April and May to gauge infection spread.
- The ICMR is still to publish details of its May sero-survey that estimated 0.73% of the population in 63 surveyed districts to be infected. For COVID-19, the reliability of such surveys still rests on nascent science.
- The Ministry has attributed to the **lowering of COVID numbers in Delhi** to the **proactive efforts** taken by the government to prevent the spread of infection, including prompt lockdown, effective containment and surveillance measures, such as contact tracing and tracking, as well as citizen's compliance to COVID appropriate behaviours.

Conclusion:

- **High-quality sero-surveys** allow explicit characterization of the distribution of immunity at a particular time point, but they also provide managers with an opportunity to evaluate assumptions made about natural transmission dynamics and vaccine program performance.
- The health ministry has so far maintained that there is no evidence yet of community transmission in the country.
- There are large outbreaks in some clusters but the sharp exponential rise in cases as in community transmission has not happened.

RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS

GENERAL STUDIES - I

Padmanabhaswamy Temple verdict & Implications

Introduction:

- The Supreme Court upheld the right of the Travancore royal family in administration of the historic Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala on Monday. The Apex Court entrusted the responsibility of managing affairs of the temple to a district judge of Thiruvananthapuram who will head an administrative committee that will oversee the affairs. The court set aside a Jan 31, 2011 verdict of the Kerala HC which had asked the state government to set up a trust to take control of the temple. The controversy over the administration and management of the historic temple has been pending in the apex court for the last nine years in the wake of charges of alleged financial irregularities

What is the case about?

- The central legal question was whether Utradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma, the younger brother of Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, the last Ruler of Travancore, could claim to be the "Ruler of Travancore" after the death of the ruler in 1991.
- The court examined this claim within the limited meaning of that term according to the Travancore-Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act, 1950 to claim ownership, control and management of the ancient Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple.

The verdict:

- The Supreme Court (SC) has reversed **the 2011 Kerala High Court decision**, which had directed the Kerala government to set up a trust to control the management and assets of the temple.
- The court said that, as per customary law, **the shebait rights** (right to manage the financial affairs of the deity) survive with the members of the family even after the death of the last ruler.
- The court defined 'shebait'** as the "custodian of the idol, its earthly spokesman, its authorised representative entitled to deal with all its temporal affairs and to manage its property".

In Depth:

- During ancient times, the Padmanabhaswamy temple was administered by the Ettarayogam (Council of eight and a half priests). Then, Raja Marthanda Varma, after becoming the king of the erstwhile Travancore State, took full control of the Padmanabhaswamy temple and administered the entire kingdom as a servant of Lord Padmanabhaswamy by describing himself as Padmanabhadasa.
- After the merger of princely states into India, an agreement was entered into between the then Maharaja and the Union of India, represented by V P Menon, to ensure that the management of the Padmanabhaswamy temple remained with the royal family.
- Secondly, Article 290A of the Constitution stipulates that certain sums of money have to be charged on and paid out of the consolidated funds of Tamil Nadu and Kerala every year for the maintenance of Hindu temples and shrines in those states. This provision inserted through the Seventh Constitution Amendment Act, 1956, relating to reorganisation of states, makes an exception only in the case of temples under control of the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin rulers, since they used to allocate money for the maintenance of shrines and the revenues from the temples would go into their treasury.
- The 1949 covenant between the Maharaja and the Union recognises that the temples in these two states would be funded out of the consolidated funds of the respective states. Article 290A still remains in the Constitution, even after Mrs Indira Gandhi's successful attempt to do away with privy purses, which lends credibility to the claim of the ex-royals.

Directions:

1. Accepting the royals' submission that **the temple is a "public temple"**, the court issued a slew of directions for its transparent administration in the future.
2. It directed the setting up of an **administrative committee with the Thiruvananthapuram District Judge as its chairperson**.
3. The other members would be a nominee of the trustee (royal family), the chief thanthri of the temple, a nominee of the State and a member nominated by the Union Ministry of Culture. This committee would **take care of the daily administration of the temple**.
4. It also ordered **a second committee to be constituted to advise the administrative committee on policy matters**.
5. This would be chaired by a retired High Court judge nominated by the Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court.

Article 366:

1. The **High Court (HC)** had ruled that the successor to the erstwhile royals could not claim to be in control of the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple after **the amendment of definition of 'Ruler' in Article 366 (22) of the Constitution of India**.
2. The definition of Ruler was amended by **the Twenty Sixth (Constitutional) Amendment Act, 1971, which abolished the privy purses**.
3. **Article 366 (22) reads**, "Ruler" means the Prince, Chief or other person who, at any time before the commencement of the Twenty Sixth (Constitutional) Amendment Act, 1971, was recognised as the Ruler of an Indian State or was recognised as the successor of such Ruler.

Is the temple the property of the royal family?

1. The character of the temple was always recognised as a public institution governed by a statute.
2. The argument of the royal family is that the temple management would vest with them for perpetuity, as per custom.
3. Even though the last ruler Balarama Varma executed a detailed will bequeathing his personal properties, he had not included the Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple as his personal property or dealt with it in his will.

Impact of this ruling:

- 1) Since 2011, the process of opening the vaults has led to the discovery of treasures within the Padmanabhaswamy temple, prompting a debate on who owns temple property and how it should be regulated.
- 2) Despite being a secular country that separates religion from the affairs of the state, Hindu temples, its assets are governed through statutory laws and boards heavily controlled by state governments.
- 3) This system came into being mainly through the development of a legal framework to outlaw untouchability by treating temples as public land; it has resulted in many legal battles.

Link: <https://youtu.be/Q2taeRPdBD0>

GENERAL STUDIES - II

1. PM E-Vidya: Digital education

Introduction:

- PM e-Vidya scheme which has been launched for multi-mode access to digital/ online education. Under the PM e-Vidya programme, there will be 12 DTH channels introduced, with one each dedicated to classes 1 to 12.

E- Vidya:

1. The main objective of PM eVidya program is to educate students through digital platforms so that the education of students does not suffer due to nationwide lockdown.
2. These top 100 universities of the country have allowed starting online education as everyone does not have access to the internet so Swayam Prabha DTH channel was announced. A program for multi-mode access to digital/online education will also be launched under **PM eVidya program**.
3. The government is set to launch 12 more channel. The PM eVidya program will also consist of 'Diksha' involving e-content and QR coded energized book for all the classes and will be called as 'one nation, one digital platform'.
4. A TV channel called 'one class, one channel' will also be launched for class 1st to 12th. The government have also decided to do radio podcast and special e-content for visually and hearing-impaired students. The government will take all these efforts to ensure the education of student does not suffer due to nationwide lockdown.
5. The benefits of PM eVidya Program as launched by the Government of India are as follows:
 - a. Students will get education sitting at home
 - b. It will be a one-stop solution for all learning needs of students
 - c. Special radio podcast will arrange for visually and hearing-impaired students
 - d. Students can study through e-content
 - e. Dedicated channel for education on tv will help students who do not have access to internet
6. A special type of e-content will be provided for visually and hearing-impaired students
7. There will be a single dedicated channel per class from class 1st to 12th which will be known as 'one class, one channel'
8. Diksha will be launched for States and union territories which will contain e-content and QR coded energized textbook for all grades it will be known as 'one nation, one digital platform'
9. Channel call Manodarpan will launch for mental health and emotional well-being student, teachers and families
10. A new national curriculum and pedagogical framework for school, early childhood and teachers will be launched which is integrated with global and 21st-century skill requirements.
11. National Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission for ensuring that every child attains Learning levels and outcomes in grade 5 by 2020 will be launched by December 2020.
12. Swayam Prabha DTH channel will launch for all classes so that the student who does not have access to the internet can study
13. The experts will do live interactive sessions from home through skype
14. It has made private DTH operators like Tata Sky and Airtel 2 year education video
15. 200 new textbook will add o e-pathshala

Impacts on education due to COVID-19 pandemic:

1. School and university closures will not only have a short-term impact on the continuity of learning for more than 285 million young learners in India but also engender far-reaching economic and societal consequences.
2. The pandemic has significantly disrupted the higher education sector as well, which is a critical determinant of a country's economic future.

3. A large number of Indian students—second only to China—enroll in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK, Australia and China.
4. Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education is expected.
5. The bigger concern, however, on everybody's mind is the effect of the disease on the employment rate. Recent graduates in India are fearing withdrawal of job offers from corporates because of the current situation.
6. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's estimates on unemployment shot up from 8.4% in mid-March to 23% in early April and the urban unemployment rate to 30.9%.

Challenges:

1. India is far behind some developing countries where digital education is getting increased attention.
2. In countries where e-learning is popular, students have access to various online resources such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which help students, teachers and professionals upgrade their skills.
3. The major challenge in EdTech reforms at the national level is the seamless integration of technology in the present Indian education system, which is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions.
4. Further, it is also important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning developed and offered by India HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly).
5. Many e-learning players offer multiple courses on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. So, the quality of courses may differ across different e-learning platforms.
6. Democratization of technology is now an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.
7. Since our education system has not trained our teachers and students to think creatively and manage in a crisis situation, and has underplayed the importance of e-learning, they are unprepared for the transition from the classroom to online.
8. Parents feel too pressed, having to support their children's classes while working from home themselves.
9. The physical classroom does not only impart the syllabus. Children are also socialised, and there is an element of sport and play which is absent in virtual learning.
10. The matrix for socialisation is not replicated on an LCD screen.
11. Poor are disconnected and irrespective of background, some children cannot relate to the online classroom, and many more are losing out on midday meals.

Other Measures:

1. **DIKSHA** (one nation-one digital platform).
2. **TV (one class-one channel)** where one dedicated channel per grade for each of the classes 1 to 12 will provide access to quality educational material.
3. **SWAYAM online courses** in MOOCs format for school and higher education.
4. **IITPAL** for IITJEE/NEET preparation.
5. **Air through Community radio and CBSE Shiksha Vani podcast.**
6. Study material for the differently abled developed on **Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY)** and in sign language on NIOS website/ YouTube.

Link: <https://youtu.be/9vTWgUF9500>

2. Mental Health: Tackling Stress & Depression

Introduction:

- According to the World Health Organization, over 90 million Indians, or 7.5% of the population, suffer from mental health issues. A study published in Lancet in December 2019, titled The burden of mental disorders across the states of India: the Global Burden of Disease Study 1990–2017, also highlights the scale of the challenge. Mental health issues are among the leading causes of non-fatal disease burden in India; one in every seven Indian was affected by mental health issues in 2017; the proportional contribution of mental health to the total disease burden has almost doubled since 1990; and suicide was the leading cause of deaths among young people — aged 15 to 39 — in 2016. Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput's tragic death has triggered a much-needed conversation on mental health in India. The pandemic also doesn't seem to be helping, playing on the minds of lakhs of people and causing stress.

Status of Mental health in India:

1. According to an estimate by the World Health Organization (WHO), mental illness makes about 15% of the total disease conditions around the world.
2. The same estimate also suggests that India has one of the largest populations affected from mental illness.
3. As a result, WHO has labelled India as the world's 'most depressing country'.
4. Moreover, between 1990 to 2017, one in seven people from India have suffered from mental illness ranging from depression, anxiety to severe conditions such as schizophrenia, according to a study. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the country is under a mental health epidemic.
5. More than 450 million people suffer from mental disorders. According to WHO, by the year 2020, depression will constitute the second largest disease burden worldwide (Murray & Lopez, 1996).

Importance of mental health:

1. Emotional and mental health is important because it's a vital part of your life and impacts your thoughts, behaviors and emotions.
2. Being healthy emotionally can promote productivity and effectiveness in activities like work, school or caregiving.
3. It plays an important part in the health of your relationships, and allows you to adapt to changes in your life and cope with adversity.
4. Our mental health encompasses our psychological, emotional and social well-being. This means it impacts how we feel, think and behave each day.
5. Our mental health also contributes to our decision making process, how we cope with stress and how we relate to others in our lives.
6. Global burden of mental health will be well beyond the treatment capacities of developed and developing countries.
7. The social and economic costs associated with growing burden of mental ill health focused the possibilities for promoting mental health as well as preventing and treating mental illness.

Stigma of mental illness

1. At one point of time the stigma of mental illness was all around the globe. It still exist all around the globe, but is significantly less in Europe, US and some of the developed countries because of the awareness programmes and the science having reached. In some parts of Asia and Africa the stigma still continues.
2. The major focus is on reducing the stigma of mental illness, mainly on not misunderstanding any psychiatric problem or mental health problem as severe mental disorder or lunacy. People with **bipolar disorder and schizophrenia** are significantly disturbed, danger to self or others, and socially embarrassing. These were referred to as lunacy.
3. 100 or 150 years ago society was not concerned about the welfare of people with mental illness. They were put in asylums and mental hospitals for the society's safety. In the last 50 years treatment methods

are available for mental illness which is significant in the last 20 years. Reducing the stigma is very important.

4. **Respecting the human rights** of the persons who are living with mental illness is important. One of the notable examples is the depression and their commonly noted complication is the suicide behaviour.

Reasons for degenerating mental health of late:

1. The first and foremost reason for India to lose its mental health is the **lack of awareness and sensitivity** about the issue.
2. There is a big stigma around people suffering from any kind of mental health issues.
3. They are often tagged as 'lunatics' by the society. This leads to a vicious cycle of shame, suffering and isolation of the patients.
4. According to WHO, in 2011, there were 0.301 psychiatrists and 0.047 psychologists for every 100,000 patients suffering from a mental health disorder in India.
5. **Treatment gap:** According to estimates nearly 92% of the people who need mental health care and treatment do not have access to any form of mental health care.
6. **The economic burden of mental illness** contributes significantly to the treatment gap in India. There are both direct (cost of long-term treatment) and indirect costs (the inability of the patient and caregiver to work, social isolation, psychological stress) contribute significantly to the economic burden.
7. **Violations of human rights** have been reported in mental asylums and also at homes and places of traditional healing. In India, mental hospitals still practice certain obscure practices that violate human rights. Further poor infrastructure such as closed structures, a lack of maintenance, unclean toilets and sleeping areas etc clearly violate the basic human right to a life with dignity.

Conclusion:

- Stigma and Awareness need to be addressed in parallel in order to tackle the burden of mental illness in India. If individuals continue to view mental illness with apprehension and resistance, it will remain difficult for people with mental health concerns to seek the support they require due to the fear of being labelled or judged.
- State mental health institutions, general hospitals, private practice, and NGOs can together help achieve the dream of mental health care for all.
- WHO says if we don't act urgently, by 2030 depression will be the leading illness globally.
- In conclusion, be kind, compassionate and empathetic towards all. Everyone is fighting their own battle, some more silently than others. It's time to add value and enrich one another's lives. Mental Illness is real, hard, disabling and needs addressal and treatment. People should seek professional help as soon as the need arises. Early detection and intervention of a psychological condition will allow you to live the life you deserve.

Link: <https://youtu.be/MAead30MjtU>

3. India – Japan Cooperation

Introduction:

- Indian and Japanese warships conducted exercises in the Indian Ocean last week. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force described the manoeuvres as designed to "promote mutual understanding" and consisted of four warships, two from each country. Naval exercises are now routine between India and Japan, but the timing of the present exercise will be related with the military stand-off between India and China in Ladakh. The Indian navy training vessels INS Rana and INS Kulush were joined by the Japanese navy's JS Kashima and JS Shimayuki. The Japanese embassy in New Delhi said this was the 15th such exercise in three years. The Japanese navy has become one of the principal partners of the Indian Navy. Indian naval ships take part in the exercise, both bilaterally with their Japanese counterparts and as part of the Malabar Exercises, which include the United States.

Bilateral Cooperation:

1. The Ministers welcomed the progress made in deepening bilateral defence cooperation last year. In this regard, the welcome of the recently conducted second “**Dharma Guardian-2019**” and the second “**SHINYUU Maitri-2019**”. They also concurred to proceed with coordination for the first India-Japan joint fighter aircraft exercise in Japan.
2. The Ministers welcomed the significant progress made in the negotiations of **Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)** since the announcement to commence the negotiations in October 2018.
3. Acknowledging the importance of ensuring maritime safety in achieving a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific, the Ministers expressed their intention to further promote cooperation in the field of capacity building in **maritime security** and **Maritime Domain Awareness** including through cooperation with other countries.
4. Emphasized the need to further strengthen the defence equipment and technology.
5. Appreciated the existing exchange programs between the defence educational and research institutions of the two countries and expressed their desire to continue and expand the exchange programmes.

Multilateral Cooperation:

1. Recalling the **Japan-India-US Summit** Meetings in November 2018 and June 2019, the Ministers acknowledged the trilateral cooperation with the US. The Ministers expressed their satisfaction at trilateral cooperation represented by the “**Malabar 2019**” held from September-October 2019 off the coast of Japan, mine-countermeasures exercise (**MINEX**) held in Japan in July 2019 and “**Cope India 2018**” in which Japan participated as an observer in December 2018.
2. The Ministers welcomed the recent Japan-India-Australia-US Foreign Ministerial consultations in New York in September 2019.

Regional and International Affairs:

1. A frank and fruitful exchange of views on the regional issues of mutual interests particularly on the security situation in the Indo-Pacific.
2. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of supporting ASEAN centrality and unity for promoting peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.
3. The Japanese side appreciated India’s announcement of “Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative” at the recent 14th EAS to create a safe, secure, stable, prosperous and sustainable maritime domain and confirmed their willingness to discuss concrete cooperation based on the Initiative.
4. The Ministers exchanged views on the recent developments in the South China Sea.
5. The importance of freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce and peaceful resolution of disputes with full respect for legal and diplomatic processes in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law, including those reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
6. It condemned in the strongest terms the growing threat of terrorism and acknowledged that it constituted a major threat to peace and security in the region.
7. It was emphasized the need for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence.

Big-ticket Investments:

1. Japan has been extending bilateral loan and grant assistance to India since 1958, and is its largest bilateral donor.
2. Japanese ODA supports India’s development in sectors such as power, transportation, environmental projects and projects related to basic human needs.
3. \$90 billion has gone into the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.
4. Japan is also backing the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (bullet train) service.
5. Discussions have also taken place on the Dedicated Freight Corridor, a project of close to Rs 50,000 crore of which Japanese assistance has been of about Rs 38,000 crore.

New Areas of Engagement:

1. A '**Cool EMS Service**' was started, under which Japanese food items are transported in cool boxes from Japan to India through postal channels.
2. Both sides are striving to push a digital partnership.
3. Areas of potential collaboration include AI, IoT, and big data.
4. India is likely to pitch for integration between the Ayushman Bharat project and the Japanese Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative.

Challenges:

1. Trade engagements have been below potential.
2. On the list of countries that India exports to, Japan is at 18th position in the list of top 25 countries. On the list of countries importing into India, Japan ranks 12th.
3. India's exports to Japan in FY18 were lower than in FY15 in value terms.
4. India struggling to penetrate the Japanese market as a result of language barriers, high quality and service standards.
5. Negotiations to purchase amphibious US-2 planes have dragged on for years.

Way Forward:

- ✓ Experts say that a strong India is in Japan's best interest and for that, Japan must provide even more support.
- ✓ India must leverage Japan's strengths in areas such as medical equipment and hospitals.
- ✓ India and Japan must endeavour to work together for a rules-based and inclusive world order.
- ✓ Enhancing communication and connectivity for unimpeded trade and flow of people, technology and ideas for shared prosperity.
- ✓ Further cooperate for peace, stability and prosperity of Indo-Pacific.

Link: <https://youtu.be/APwD3VAu5yE>

4. Kuwait's expat Bill & impact on India

Introduction:

As many as 7-8 lakh Indians could be forced out of Kuwait if a new bill on expats is enacted into law. The legal and legislative committee of Kuwait's National Assembly has approved the draft expat quota bill, according to which Indians should not exceed 15 percent of the population. The bill will be transferred to a respective committee so that a comprehensive plan is created. The National Assembly's legal and legislative committee has determined that the draft expat quota bill is constitutional. The Gulf News reported that 'this could result in 8 lakh Indians leaving Kuwait, as the Indian community constitutes the largest expat community in Kuwait, totalling 14.5 lakh'. Of the 43 lakh population of Kuwait, expats account for 30 lakhs. Kuwait is also a top source of remittances for India. In 2018, India received close to \$4.8 billion from Kuwait as remittances

- With the Kuwait government deciding to halve the Gulf country's expatriate population to 30% of the total amid a slump in oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic, around 8 lakh Indians could be forced to leave the country.
- Kuwait National Assembly's legal and legislative committee has approved the draft expat quota bill, according to which Indians should not exceed 15% of the population.
- The bill will now be transferred to the respective committee so that a comprehensive plan is created, according to reports.

India-Kuwait ties:

1. The ties have always had a significant economic and trade dimension. In recent years it has also diversified to include culture, science, and technology, civil aviation, and youth affairs.
2. India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait. Kuwait has been a reliable supplier of **crude oil** to India.
3. During 2017-18, Kuwait was the ninth largest oil supplier to India, and it meets about 4.63 percent of India's energy needs. Bilateral trade with Kuwait during 2016-17 was \$5.9 billion, and in 2017-18 it went up to \$8.53 billion. In FY19 it grew by 2.7 percent growth to \$8.76 billion: while Indian exports were \$1.33 billion, imports were \$7.43 billion.
4. Exports from India include food items, textiles, electrical and engineering equipment, ceramics, automobiles, chemicals, jewellery, metal products, etc.
5. Importantly, Kuwait is one of the top sources of remittances for India. According to the Ministry of External Affairs data, in 2018, India received \$4.8 billion as remittances from Kuwait. According to the Reserve Bank of India, 58.7 percent of total remittances was received by four states: Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
6. The flow of remittances broadly mirrors the state-wise composition of overseas migrants. The southern states dominated with a combined share of 46 percent in total remittances.

Demographic imbalance:

1. The new draft law is, reportedly, designed to address what Kuwaiti lawmakers have labelled a 'demographic imbalance.' Indians are not the only ones affected, with the Egyptian contingent within the nation also now facing grave uncertainty.
2. Although no formal plans over the implementation of the legislation have been drawn up as yet, there have been reports that the country may choose to gradually cut down its expat population over the next few years. Nevertheless, this will have huge implications for the Indian workers employed in the state, many of whom are already suffering from unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Kuwait is also a large source of remittances into India. By some estimates, nearly \$4.8 billion was received from migrant workers in the nation, into India, in 2018. Given the fallout of the pandemic, coupled with the slump in oil prices.
4. Kuwait, along with other Gulf nations, may no longer be able to heavily subsidise its citizens as they have done in the past, which would then, naturally, translate to putting them to work. This, unfortunately for India's migrant workers, is likely to come at the cost of expat jobs.

Indian community:

1. According to the Indian Embassy, besides the million-plus who are in the country as legal workforce, there are about 10,000 Indian nationals who have overstayed their visas.
2. The Indian community in Kuwait has been growing at 5-6% per annum until the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt stop to immigration to the country.
3. Indians are the largest expatriate community and Egyptians are the second largest. Three fourths, or about 7.5 lakh Indians are males as against only 2.5 lakh females.
4. It is estimated that 5.23 lakh Indians are deployed in the private sector, as construction workers, technicians, engineers, doctors, chartered accountants, IT experts, etc.
5. About 1.16 lakh are dependents and there are about 60,000 Indian students studying in 23 Indian schools in the country; about 3.27 lakh are domestic workers (i.e. drivers, gardeners, cleaners, nannies, cooks and housemaids) who are not allowed to bring their spouses/children into the country.
6. About 28,000 Indians work for the Kuwaiti government in various jobs such as nurses, engineers in national oil companies, and a few as scientists. In 2018, India received nearly \$4.8 billion from Kuwait as remittances

What happens now?

1. Around eight million Indians work in the GCC countries. Around 2.1 million of them are from one State — Kerala. Other major contributors to the Indian expatriate communities in GCC countries are Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab and Rajasthan.
2. A renewed push for nationalisation of jobs and diversification of expatriates is possible. However, the structure of the GCC economies makes any dramatic change unlikely. Nationalisation of government jobs can be achieved to a significant extent, but the private sector will continue to draw the majority of its workforce from abroad.
3. There is a social stratification in GCC countries that has natives at the top, followed by white professionals from the U.S. and Europe, immigrants from other Arab countries and then others including workers from India.
4. There is a division of labour among these classes and that cannot be changed in a hurry. Replacement of Indian or Asian workers on a large scale is not possible, and native Arabs will not do certain categories of work.

Link: <https://youtu.be/oV0KhItZo-E>

5. Senkaku-Diaoyu Islands dispute

Introduction:

Japan and China claim the uninhabited islands, known as the Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China, as their own, but Japan has administered them since 1972. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands were formally claimed by Japan in 1895. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the island chain was controlled by the US until 1971 before its return. Since then, Japan has administered the island chains. China began to reassert claims over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the 1970s, citing historic rights to the area. However, Japan does not recognise Chinese claims. More recently, there has been a flare up in the region. The Japanese government said on Thursday it had protested to China regarding a set of names recently assigned by Beijing to seabed zones in the East China Sea, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

1. The **Senkaku Islands dispute**, or **Diaoyu Islands dispute**, concerns a territorial dispute over a group of uninhabited islands known as the Senkaku Islands in Japan, the Diaoyu Islands in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taioyutai Islands in the Republic of China (ROC or Taiwan).
2. Aside from a 1945 to 1972 period of administration by the United States as part of the Ryukyu Islands, the archipelago has been controlled by Japan since 1895.
3. According to Lee Seokwoo, the People's Republic of China (PRC) started taking up the question of sovereignty over the islands in the latter half of 1970 when evidence relating to the existence of oil reserves surfaced. Taiwan (the Republic of China; ROC) also claims the islands.
4. The territory is close to key shipping lanes and rich fishing grounds, and there may be oil reserves in the area.
5. Japan argues that it surveyed the islands in the late 19th century and found them to be terra nullius (Latin: land belonging to no one); subsequently, China acquiesced to Japanese sovereignty until the 1970s.
6. The PRC and the ROC argue that documentary evidence prior to the First Sino-Japanese War indicates Chinese possession and that the territory is accordingly a Japanese seizure that should be returned as the rest of Imperial Japan's conquests were returned in 1945.
7. The islands are included within the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, meaning that a defense of the islands by Japan would require the United States to come to Japan's aid.
8. In September 2012, the Japanese government purchased three of the disputed islands from their private owner, prompting large-scale protests in China. As of early February 2013, the situation has been regarded as "the most serious for Sino-Japanese relations in the post-war period in terms of the risk of militarised conflict."

9. On 23 November 2013, the PRC set up the “East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone” which includes the Senkaku Islands, and announced that it would require all aircraft entering the zone to file a flight plan and submit radio frequency or transponder information.

Japan's territorial sovereignty:

1. The Senkaku Islands were not included in the territory which Japan renounced under Article 2 of **the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951** that legally defined the territory of Japan after World War II.
2. Under **Article 3 of the treaty**, the islands were placed under the administration of the United States as part of **the Nansei Shoto Islands**.
3. The Senkaku Islands are included in the areas whose administrative rights were reverted to Japan in accordance with the Agreement between Japan and the United States of America Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands that entered into force in **1972**.

China's claim:

1. China says that the islands have been part of its territory since ancient times, serving as important fishing grounds administered by the province of Taiwan.
2. Taiwan was ceded to Japan in **the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895**, after the Sino-Japanese war.
3. When Taiwan was returned in the Treaty of San Francisco, China says the islands should have been returned too.

Strategic Value:

1. Strategic value of the islands is that possessing them would aid the Chinese military in breaking through the first island chain separating continental China from the Pacific Ocean.
2. The first island chain stretches from the Korean peninsula southward across the Japanese Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and beyond to the Philippines. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are located inside this island chain, northeast of Taiwan on the western edge of the Okinawa Trough.
3. To break through the chain the Chinese military would likely attempt capturing islands such as Miyako and Ishigaki for control of the strait that lies between them.
4. They would provide a platform for placing strategically useful assets such as radar installations or missiles closer to either the island chain or the Chinese continental coastline, respectively, as well as nearby sea lines of communication.

Fishing rights

1. The issue of sovereignty has been carefully circumvented in bilateral fishing agreements.
2. In the 1997 fishing agreement, the Senkaku Islands were officially excluded from China's exclusive economic zone, but in a letter of intent Japan explained that Japan would not prevent Chinese boats from fishing there.
3. Some Chinese sources have subsequently argued that this letter constitutes a waiver of Japan's claim to exclusive fishing rights. In 2014, Taiwan and Japan came to an agreement on fishing in the waters around the islands.

Other border disputes of China:

1. It has island and maritime border disputes with Taiwan, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and its extension.
2. The disputes include islands, reefs, banks and other features in the South China Sea including Spratly Islands (with Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan), Paracel Islands (Vietnam), Scarborough Shoal (Philippines), and Gulf of Tonkin (Vietnam).

Link: <https://youtu.be/ulds9vluEDU>

6. India- Russia defence ties

Introduction:

- The relations between India and Russia are one of “**Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**” and the ongoing military contracts between the two sides will be maintained and in a number of cases will be taken forward in a shorter time, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said. Singh, who was in Moscow on a three-day visit at the invitation of the Russian Ministry of Defence to attend the 75th Anniversary of Victory Day Parade, said his visit to Moscow was the first foreign visit from India of an official delegation after the COVID-19 pandemic. All our proposals have received positive responses from the Russian side. I am fully satisfied with my discussions,” Singh said, indicating the timely delivery of the S-400 missile defence systems to India. Moscow was to begin the delivery of the system by the second half of next year. Russia has been one of India’s key suppliers of arms and ammunition. However, it has been a long-standing grievance of armed forces that supply of critical spares and equipment from Russia takes a long time affecting maintenance of military systems procured from that country.

India and Russia:

1. India has a historical relationship with Russia, spanning over seven decades.
2. While the relationship has grown in some areas and atrophied in some others, the strongest pillar of the strategic partnership is of the defence basket.
3. Although New Delhi has consciously diversified its new purchases from other countries, the bulk of its defence equipment is from Russia. Estimates say 60 to 70 per cent of India’s supplies are from Russia, and New Delhi needs a regular and reliable supply of spare parts from the Russian defence industry. In fact, Prime Minister Modi has held informal summits with only two leaders — Xi and Putin.
4. India has made this decision to reach out to Russia not just out of choice, but also out of necessity, since it believes Moscow has leverage and influence to shape and change Beijing’s hard stance on border issue.
5. At this time when there is tension at the border, Defence Minister Singh have discussed supply and purchase of new defence systems — like the S-400 missile defence system — with the Russian top brass in the military and government.

India Russia defence trade:

1. While India and Russia’s economic relationship has been a weak point in the post-Cold War period, the most glaring sign of the stagnation may yet be that in 2014, the US emerged as the top arms supplier to India, pushing Russia to the second position based on data for the preceding three years.
2. At the same time, India became the top foreign buyer of US weapons in 2014.
3. Given that the military-technical ties were historically the bedrock of India and Russia’s relationship, a drop in the sector was a clear matter of concern.
4. While in overall terms, Russia remained India’s top supplier of defence items during the period 2014-18, the total exports fell by 42 percent between 2014-18 and 2009-13.
5. Russia still commands 58 percent of total arms imports by India, followed by Israel and the US at 15 and 12 percent, respectively.
6. Despite this, Russia’s market share ensures that the country remains a critical supplier to India, both of new arms and spare parts.
7. The military-technical cooperation that includes transfer of technology and joint production is a unique relationship that is extremely valuable to India.
8. Also, the low of 2014 has since been corrected and in 2016, crucial inter-government agreements were signed at the annual summit including the supply of S-400 Triumph Air Defence Missile System and four Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates (2018), as well as a shareholder deal regarding the manufacture of Ka-226T helicopters in India.

Reasons for decline in Defence trade:

1. Several factors have been identified for the gradual decline in the orders of India from Russia.

2. India's desire to diversify its defence imports and therefore a heightened competition for Russia with other suppliers; and dissatisfaction in India with post-sales services and maintenance being offered by Russia.
3. Moreover, India has also had concerns in the past regarding supply and servicing of defence supplies. Some of these included a five-year delay in the delivery of aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov (later renamed INS Vikramaditya) as well as its cost escalation from \$974 million to \$2.35 billion.
4. India was also displeased by the high cost and low quality of spare parts for weaponry imported from Russia in the past, as well as delays in the supply.

Recent developments:

1. In a step forward towards addressing the issue of regular spares and support for Russian military equipment with the armed forces, 14 MoUs were signed between Indian and Russian companies for setting up joint ventures covering a range of equipment from modern T-90 tanks to legacy Pechora air defence systems.
2. The MoUs were signed during the 5th India Russia military industry conference held during the Defexpo 2020 in Lucknow.
3. They come under the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on joint manufacturing of spares in India signed last September for mutual cooperation in manufacturing of spares, components, aggregates and other material related to Russian or Soviet-origin arms and defence equipment.
4. The first 'Request for Proposal' for manufacturing of parts in India under the provision of IGA was also handed over by the Navy to the identified Indian industry.
5. One MoU was signed between the Spetz-Radio Corporation of Russia and the Ananth Technologies based in Hyderabad for the "development, production and manufacture of small spacecraft for remote sensing".
6. Joint creation and commercial use [providing a radio frequency resource] of a network of ground control stations for small spacecraft and a network of ground stations for the reception and processing of earth remote sensing data.
7. One important MoU was signed between the Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) and the Almaz Antey of Russia for exploring the feasibility of establishing a joint venture in India for the production of various sub systems of "air defence missile systems like Tunguska, Kavadrat, the OSA-AKA, Pechora air defence system as well as the Shilka self-propelled air defence gun system".
8. The MoU also covered refurbishment and life extension of the missiles.
9. Most of these air defence systems are now in the process of being phased out and replaced with new ones.
10. There are also agreements on emerging technologies — Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, blockchain and robotics based on Russian technologies under the proposed Indo-Russian Joint Venture ICT Center of Excellence.

Link: <https://youtu.be/o3QRVn6TGFU>

7. H-1B Visas temporarily suspended

Introduction:

- U.S. President Donald Trump suspended the entry into the United States of certain foreign workers on Monday, a move the White House said would help the coronavirus-battered economy, but which business groups strongly oppose. Trump issued a presidential proclamation that temporarily blocks foreign workers entering on H-1B visas for skilled employees, and L visas, for managers and specialized workers being transferred within a company. He also blocked those entering on H-2B seasonal worker visas, used by landscapers and other industries. Businesses including major tech companies and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the visa suspension would stifle the economic recovery after the damage done by the pandemic. The proclamation's immediate effects are likely to be limited, as U.S. consulates around the world remain closed for most routine visa processing. The order exempts those already in the United

States, as well as valid visa holders abroad, but they must have an official travel document that permits entry into the United States.

H1B visa:

- The **H1B visa** is a non-immigrant visa that allows companies to employ foreigners for a period of up to six years. This visa is aimed at helping companies employ foreigners in positions for which they have been unable to find American employees. The minimum salary for an employee holding the H1B visa is set at \$60,000 per year.
 - **L1 visas** allows companies to transfer highly skilled workers to US for a period of up to seven years.
 - **H-2B visas** allow food and agricultural workers to seek employment in the US.
 - **J-1 Visas:** It is for students on work-study summer programmes.

Why is H1B visa programme criticised?

1. The aim of the H1B visa programme was to supplement the US workforce with high-skilled workers to do jobs that Americans are not skilled to do, not to replace the US workers.
2. But over time, there have been many grumbings that many companies use the H1B visa to replace American workers with foreign ones, as the latter can be hired at lower salaries without compromising on the skill sets.
3. In some cases, American employees have alleged that they were made to train H1B holders to do their own jobs, and then fired.

H1-B visas among those suspended till year end:

1. The broad-brush order includes the **H-1B visa for skilled workers**, which is widely garnered by Indian nationals, the **H-2B visa issued to seasonal workers** in the landscaping and hospitality industries, the **L-1 visa for intra-company transfers**, and the J-1 visa for students on work-study summer programmes.
2. It will also **impact the H-4 visa for dependents of H-1B visa holders**. The proclamation will enter into force on June 24 and be applicable until the end of the calendar year, which notably includes the November 3 presidential election.
3. It is intended as a follow-on order reducing the number of foreigners entering the U.S., as it comes on the back of the **60-day halt in legal migration** that began on April 23.

Why this order was issued?

- **To protect American jobs** during the ongoing pandemic. The entry of additional workers through the H-1B, H-2B, J, and L non-immigrant visa programmes presents a significant threat to employment opportunities for domestic workers by undercutting their jobs.
- allowed to apply for permanent residency in the US as well as buy or sell property in the country.

How will this affect the US?

- Skilled foreign workers who come to work in the United States on H1-B visas don't just directly supplement the US IT industry with specialised skillsets, they also contribute indirectly to other industries in the US.
- Often H1-B workers bring their families along and thereby bring additional business for other industries like real estate, Banking, hospitality, to name a few.
- The effects of this announcement will impact the GDP and the overall business economy and growth of US. While 20% of H1-B visa quotas have been set aside for start-ups and small employers with 50 or fewer employees, there is no denying that this will be a dampener to the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- In midst of all this, it's critical to remember that most US-based companies (including many Fortune 500s) are highly dependent on IT Services Providers.

- These companies actively outsource for both skills and cost advantages – important to note, it's not just the latter that drives the decisions. Changes in the H1-B visa arrangement will add immense cost pressures on these organisations.

How does it impact Indian IT companies?

1. Indian IT companies are amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the US H-1B visa regime, and have since 1990s cornered a lion's share of the total number of visas issued each year.
2. As of April 1, 2020, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had received about 2.5 lakh H-1B work visa applications, according to official data. Indians had applied for as many as 1.84 lakh or 67 per cent of the total H-1B work visas for the current financial year ending March 2021.
3. Apart from the suspension of these work visas, the executive order signed by Trump has also made sweeping changes to the H-1B work visa norms, which will no longer be decided by the currently prevalent lottery system. The new norms will now favour highly-skilled workers who are paid the highest wages by their respective companies.
4. This could result in a significant impact on margins and worker wages of Indian IT companies which send thousands of low-cost employees to work on client sites in the US.
5. Though the large Indian IT companies have cut down their dependency on H-1B and other worker visas by hiring as much as 50 per cent of staff locally, they still rely on these visas to keep costs in check.
6. Indian IT companies also offer subcontracts to Indian nationals already present in the US with valid H-1B visas. Bangalore-based Wipro spends as much as 20 per cent of its revenue to subcontract Indian workers with valid H-1B visas.

Way ahead:

- ✓ As labour and capital quit American shores, the more they try to protect their jobs, the more it will affect the rest of the world. But India being one of the fastest growing markets, has plenty of opportunities to stand up to it and deliver, but that require persistent mending of ways things function.
- ✓ While there may be a temporary plug on legal issues in the US, it will lose the perception battle internationally. Since it is arguably inevitable, this gives a lot of chance to India, to introspect and build its own infrastructure.
- ✓ When it comes to the IT industry, initially the Indian companies will be pressurised to hire Indian talent, but eventually, it will help in overall growth.
- ✓ Additionally, Make in India and Buy American can work together too, which can only improve bilateral trade between the nations. While there may or may not be much logic in the events to come, the unpredictability can also be the sole reason for India to improve internally.

Link: <https://youtu.be/OsBbVYti6Os>

8. Treaty on Open Skies

Introduction:

- Russia and the other members of the Treaty on Open Skies held a videoconference to discuss the framework's future following America's announcement in late May that it plans to withdraw from the agreement. The Treaty on Open Skies allows member states to conduct surveillance flights over one another's territories under certain controlled conditions in order to reduce the likelihood of a war by miscalculation. The U.S.' withdrawal raised concern that the global security architecture will continue to collapse

Treaty:

1. The Outer Space Treaty is about governing the activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space.
2. It is a treaty that forms the basis of international space law.

3. This treaty was signed in 1967, was agreed through the UN, and it remains as the 'constitution' of outer space.
4. Provisions in it:
 - a. The exploration and use of outer space shall be for the benefit of all countries.
 - b. It is not subject to claim by any particular nation.
 - c. States shall be responsible for national space activities whether carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities.
 - d. States shall avoid harmful contamination of space and celestial bodies.
5. Why was the treaty formulated?
 - a. Formulated to bar its signatory countries from placing weapons of mass destruction in the outer space.
 - b. To get the countries to use space exploration for peaceful purposes.
 - c. The profitability through asteroid mining and satellite exploration if uncontrolled could lead to geopolitical bid for power in the Outer Space.
 - d. An attempt to establish Space as a Global Commons of sorts, for the benefit of mankind.
 - e. To forbid any government from claiming a celestial resource such as the Moon or a planet
 - f. To make the State liable for damages caused by their space object.

Reasons for US Departure:

1. While it was envisaged as a key arms control agreement, many in US had for over a decade accused Russia of non-compliance with OST protocols.
2. Russia was blamed for obstructing surveillance flights on its territory, while misusing its own missions for gathering key tactical data.
3. The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Russia of violating the Treaty openly and continuously in various ways for years.
4. So the U.S. President Trump's administration has now chosen to withdraw from the pact.
5. Russia has denied the allegations, and has called U.S.'s exit as very regrettable.

The Strategic Importance of Space Law for India:

1. India as a leading space faring nation with successful probes to moon and Mars, a comprehensive space act has become a necessity to give a greater level of acceleration to its space activities.
2. With the Indian Government making efforts to use space technology for developmental and governance activities in the country, there is a need for a well conceived space act.
3. A Space law would spell out how government would go about tackling space related issues including untoward incidents.
4. To boost private participation in the rapidly expanding Indian space activities.
5. There are 22 nations that have domestic space laws. India must also strive for it.
6. This will be a catalyst to further boost India's space activities and regulate them to be in sync with dynamics of global space activities. • China's showcase of military prowess in space, for example, the anti-satellite tests, makes the need for a domestic law.

Implications of US Departure:

1. The exit from the Open Skies Treaty is the most recent example of important pacts Washington has stepped away from during the Trump presidency, including the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.
2. Pompeo said that the US would reconsider its decision to withdraw if Russia demonstrates a return to full compliance.
3. This approach is reminiscent from last year when Trump had suspended US participation in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
4. Then too, the USA had said that it would re-engage with Russia if it sought a new treaty – a possibility that never materialised.
5. Experts believe that the same could happen with the OST, with Russia using USA's exit as a pretext for leaving the treaty itself.

6. Russia's departure could adversely impact USA's European allies that rely on OST data to track Russian troop movements in the Baltic region.
7. Pulling out of the OST, an important multilateral arms control agreement would be yet another gift from the US to Russia.

Out of another treaty

1. The OST exit is only the most recent example in the list of important pacts that Washington has stepped away from during the Trump presidency, such as the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.
2. Experts are now contemplating the fate of the much larger US-Russia 'New START' nuclear arms control agreement, which is slated to expire in February 2021. Trump has already said that his administration would not renew the treaty unless China joins.

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

GENERAL STUDIES - III

1. Privatisation of public sector enterprises

Introduction:

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently announced major reforms for Public Sector Undertakings, as a result of which many sectors are likely to see large-scale consolidation and divestment of State-run firms. The government will soon announce a new PSU policy, which will focus on privatising PSUs in non-strategic sectors based on feasibility. The policy will, in parallel, specify certain strategic sectors in which the "presence of PSEs in public interest" will be mandatory.

Privatisation:

- It means migration from the Public to Private Sector through the transfer of ownership, management and control.
- In India, privatisation is aimed at improving the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) or investment in sectors that require technological advancements, thereby directly providing a boost to Economy.
- Govt has now announced that all PSUs in non-strategic sectors will be privatized, while in the strategic sector, there will be only one to maximum 4 PSUs fully owned by Govt.
- Rest every PSU in India will be privatized.
- Objective behind PSU Privatisation
 - Minimise the administrative cost of the Central Government
 - Boost the CPSE Disinvestment programme of the central government

Disinvestment:

- Disinvestment, or divestment, refers to the act of a business or government selling or liquidating an asset or subsidiary or the process of dilution of a government's stake in a PSU (Public Sector Undertaking).
- Disinvestment indicates only a partial dilution of control by the Govt and still retaining overall ownership of a particular enterprise, whereas privatisation for all purposes signify relinquishing the entire ownership in favour of private parties.

Privatization's experience:

- India's attempt at dismantling the PSUs over the years has seen little success, with the last big-ticket privatization taking place between 1999 and 2004.

- Since then, most governments have tried to disinvest and privatize. But this has led only to incremental progress, with no big-ticket privatization taking place since then. A good example is Air India, the national carrier that the Centre has repeatedly tried to privatize. However, it has met with limited success.
- Stiff opposition from unions, concerns of allegations of graft and criticism of the sale of “family silver” act as major hurdles to the drive for privatization.
- A good example of privatization and its effect on the enterprise is Hindustan Zinc. The Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP government sold 45% of Hindustan Zinc for ₹769 crore in 2002. The 30% stake the government retained was valued at over ₹20,000 crore. The company became the world’s second-largest zinc-lead miner and one of the top 10 silver producers. Management change and privatization can thus raise shareholder wealth through improved efficiency.

What are Central Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) or Public Sector Units (PSUs)?

1. Companies in which Central Government or a CPSE holds 51% stake or direct holding are known as Central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) or Public Sector Units (PSUs).
2. In India, CPSEs hold key position in sectors like Petroleum, Banks, Coal, Power, Steel and Mining such as SBI in Banking sector; LIC in life insurance; Coal India Limited in coal sector and others.

What’s the upshot of selling these public sector firms?

1. Most PSUs are making losses and are funded by the largesse of taxpayers. The public resources spent on them could be better utilized elsewhere, especially for development.
2. Selling them can also yield non-tax revenue, which could be used to augment public infrastructure. Moreover, their turnaround by the private sector can generate tax revenue for the government.

But why not disinvest, rather than privatize?

- The Centre has had some success with disinvestment over the years. Of late, most of the disinvestments are funded by the Life Insurance Corporation of India.
- The problem in disinvestment is that it does not ensure a change in management of the enterprise. To make PSUs efficient, there is a need to bring in private management that runs it with the aim of maximizing profit.
- Thus, privatization is important and disinvestment a second-best alternative that yields revenues for the Centre, but does not improve the condition of the enterprise.

Challenges:

1. **Loss making units** don’t attract investment so easily.
2. Government has mostly used it for fiscal reasons rather than growth objectives.
3. Most firms are not clear with their **legal land rights**.
4. Process is not favoured socially as it is against the interests of socially disadvantaged people.
5. Over the years the policy has increasingly become a tool to raise resources to **cover the fiscal deficit** with little focus on market discipline or strategic objective.
6. Sometimes with the emergence of private monopolies consumer welfare will be reduced.
7. Mere change of ownership from public to private does not ensure higher efficiency and productivity.
8. It may lead to retrenchment of workers who will be deprived of the means of their livelihood.
9. Private sector governed as they are by profit motive has a tendency to use capital intensive techniques which will worsen unemployment problem in India.

Link: <https://youtu.be/Tt-5c162Eqk>

2. Challenges for MSME Sector

Significance of MSMEs:

1. With around 63.4 million units throughout the geographical expanse of the country, **MSMEs contribute around 6.11% of the manufacturing GDP and 24.63% of the GDP from service activities as well as 33.4% of India's manufacturing output.**
2. They have been able to provide **employment to around 120 million persons and contribute around 45% of the overall exports from India.**
3. About **20% of the MSMEs are based out of rural areas**, which indicates the deployment of significant rural workforce in the MSME sector.

Measures announced:

1. Changed Definition of MSME:

- Previously, an enterprise with investment up to Rs 25 lakh was called a micro unit. Under the new definition, **a firm upto investment of Rs 1 crore is to be called Micro unit, of Rs 10 crore is to be called as small unit and investment greater than Rs 20 crore will be called as medium unit.**
- With the changed definition **both investment and turn over is used to define MSMEs.** Under the new definition a firm with turn over of Rs 5 crore is to be called a micro unit, of Rs 50 crore will be called as small unit and turn over greater than Rs 100 crore is to be called as Medium unit.
- It is to be noted that **for an enterprise to come under the category of MSME it has to fulfill both investment and turn over conditions.**
- Also, under the new definition, **the differentiation between the manufacturing and service based MSMEs are being removed.**

2. Collateral free loans to MSMEs:

- In a major boost to the MSME sector, collateral free loan of 3 lakh crore rupees has been announced with a moratorium of 12 months. These loans will benefit 45 lakh small and medium units

What kind of problems do MSMEs in India face?

1. Most of them are not registered anywhere. A big reason for this is that they are just too small. Even GST has its threshold and most micro enterprises do not qualify.
2. This apparent invisibility tends to work for enterprises as well as against them. Being out of the formal network, they do not have to maintain accounts, pay taxes or adhere to regulatory norms etc. This brings down their costs.
3. But, as it is clear in a time of crisis, it also constrains a government's ability to help them. For instance, in some of developed countries, the government has tried to directly provide wage subsidy and extra credit to smaller firms but that could happen because even smaller firms were being mapped.
4. Related to this is possibly the single-biggest hurdle facing the MSMEs – lack of financing.
5. According to a 2018 report by the International Finance Corporation (part of the World Bank), the formal banking system supplies less than one-third (or about Rs 11 lakh crore) of the credit MSME credit need that it can potentially fund.
6. In other words, most of the MSME funding comes from informal sources and this fact is crucial because it explains why the Reserve Bank of India's efforts to push more liquidity towards the MSMEs have had a limited impact.
7. A key reason why banks dither from extending loans to MSMEs is the high ratio of bad loans, data show higher slippage for relatively bigger enterprises.
8. The other big issue plaguing the sector is the delays in payments to MSMEs — be it from their buyers (which includes the government also) or things like GST refunds etc.

Impact of Covid-19:

- MSMEs were already struggling- in terms of declining revenues and capacity utilisation — in the lead-up to the Covid-19 crisis. The total lockdown has raised a question mark on the existence of many primarily because these are not firms that have too much cash to wait out the crisis.
- That explains the job losses, he said. According to a recent survey he did for “small and medium” firms in manufacturing, only 7% said they will be able to survive for more than three months with their cash in hand if their business remains closed.
- A big hurdle to restarting now is the lack of labour availability.

What about credit guarantees?

- Loans to MSMEs are mostly given against property (as collateral) — because often there isn't a robust cash flow analysis available — but in times of crisis, property values fall and that inhibits the extension of new loans.
- A credit guarantee by the government helps as it assures the bank that its loan will be repaid by the government in case the MSME falters.

Way Forward:

- ✓ The RBI has been trying to pump money into the MSME sector but given the structural constraints, it has had limited impact.
- ✓ The government can provide tax relief (GST and corporate tax), give swifter refunds, and provide liquidity to rural India (say, through PM-Kisan) to boost demand for MSME products
- ✓ Identifying micro, small and medium enterprises and their workers
- ✓ Developing a vulnerability assessment framework of MSME sectors
- ✓ Increasing the capacity of the Samadhaan system to expeditiously clear government dues
- ✓ Improving the creditworthiness of small businesses.

Link: https://youtu.be/fJbTy4yDU_A?list=PLVOgwADiGzqPZnhoj99VsKgkv_03gN3i

3. India's Solar Energy push

Introduction:

On 15 February, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an interesting observation in his inaugural speech for the first RE-Invest global summit in New Delhi. He remarked that Indian energy sector has been thinking in terms of Mega Watts (MW), but for the first time, India had started talking about Giga Watts (GW). It was inconceivable that India aimed at 100 GW of installed solar power capacity by 2022, given that the entire country had under 3 GW of existing installations when the Modi government took over. Yet, the ambitious target set clearly signalled the government's intent to make solar energy an integral part of Indian energy security strategy. India has managed to hit about 35 GW in installed capacity till now. One major gap is rooftop solar, which has not progressed much. So while adding 65 GW of solar capacity in two years looks tough, opening up the rooftop solar market nationwide can help push the envelope. But even this current progress from 3 GW to 35 GW was not easy. One of the projects which gave impetus to this journey was the Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Ltd (RUMSL) solar plant, inaugurated by PM Modi on 10 July

1. **Solar power in India** is a fast developing industry. The country's solar installed capacity reached 35.12 GW as of 30 June 2020. India has the lowest capital cost per MW globally of installing solar power plants.
2. The Indian government had an initial target of 20 GW capacity for 2022, which was achieved four years ahead of schedule.
3. In 2015 the target was raised to 100 GW of solar capacity (including 40 GW from rooftop solar) by 2022, targeting an investment of US\$100 billion.

4. India has established nearly 42 solar parks to make land available to the promoters of solar plants. In the decade ending 31 March 2020, India expanded its installed solar power capacity by 233 times from 161 MW to 37,627 MW.
5. Rooftop solar power accounts for 2.1 GW, of which 70% is industrial or commercial. In addition to its large-scale grid-connected solar photovoltaic (PV) initiative, India is developing off-grid solar power for local energy needs.
6. Solar products have increasingly helped to meet rural needs; by the end of 2015 just under one million solar lanterns were sold in the country, reducing the need for kerosene.
7. That year, 118,700 solar home lighting systems were installed and 46,655 solar street lighting installations were provided under a national program; just over 1.4 million solar cookers were distributed in India.
8. The International Solar Alliance (ISA), proposed by India as a founder member, is headquartered in India. India has also put forward the concept of "One Sun One World one Grid" to harness abundant solar power on global scale

For India: Installing 100 GW of solar power by 2022 achievable target?

1. The government would recognise, the idea of building a **domestic solar manufacturing industry** that delivers increasing volumes of quality photovoltaic cells, modules and associated equipment is long in the tooth.
2. **India's installed base** of this green power source is about **35 gigawatts (GW)**, and its projected addition of capacity until 2024 in a COVID-19 affected future is estimated by the industry to be of the order of 50 GW.
3. Viewed against the goals set five years ago for the **Paris Agreement on climate**, of **installing 100 GW of solar power by 2022**, there could be a **sharp deficit**.
4. Combined with **low domestic cell manufacturing capacity** at 3.1 GW last year, and heavy reliance on China, high ambition must now be supported by aggressive official policy.
5. The Chinese story is one of a steady rise from insignificant manufacturing capability in the 1990s, to **virtual dominance** through active government support in identifying and acquiring top technologies globally, importing critical raw materials such as polysilicon, acquiring solar manufacturers abroad, and investing in third countries with ready capability.
6. Importantly, the domestic market was treated with great importance while promoting exports.

India is not a leader in Solar panel Manufacturer:

1. Just as India has had **no overall industrial policy** since economic reforms began, there is **no real plan** in place to **ensure solar panel manufacture**.
2. India should have taken a **lead in solar panel manufacture** to generate solar energy long ago. The share of all manufacturing in GDP was 16% in 1991; it remained the same in 2017.
3. Despite the new policy focus on solar plant installation, India is **still not a solar panel manufacturer**.
4. The solar power potential offers a **manufacturing opportunity**. The government is a near **monopsonistic buyer**.

Government Initiatives:

1. Wider adoption of roof-top solar power generation.
2. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), which provides 30 per cent subsidy to most solar powered items such as solar lamps and solar heating systems, has further extended its subsidy scheme to solar-powered cold storages.
3. The Ministry of Shipping plans to install solar based power systems at all the major ports across the country by 2017.
4. The Government of India announced a massive renewable power production target of 175,000 MW by 2022 of which 100,000 MW is from solar power.
5. The Government of India is taking a number of steps and initiatives like 10-year tax exemption for solar energy projects.

6. The National Solar Mission aims to promote the development and use of solar energy for power generation.
7. Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) that provide an incentive to those who generate green power by providing financial incentives for every unit of power they generate.

Lessons from China:

1. Core competence
 - a. The six largest Chinese manufacturers had core technical competence in manufacturing solar cells.
 - b. When the solar industry in China began to grow, Chinese companies already possessed the know-how.
 - c. Indian companies had no learning background in semiconductors when the solar industry in India began to grow from 2011.
2. Government policy
 - a. Chinese government has subsidised land acquisition, raw material, labour and export.
 - b. Commitment by the government to procure over the long run.
3. Cost of capital
 - a. The cost of debt in India (11%) is highest in the Asia-Pacific region, while in China it is about 5%.

Challenges:

1. Lack of easy and cheap funding, and increasing cheap imports from China and Taiwan is hurting the domestic industry.
2. The fundamental re-structuring of the country's power and energy infrastructure will be its biggest challenge.
3. Cost associated with solar power generation is more when compared to coal.
4. Transmission & Distribution losses that at approximately 40 percent make generation through solar energy sources highly unfeasible.
5. Per capita land availability is very low in India, and land is a scarce resource.
6. Manufacturers are mostly focused on export markets that buy Solar PV cells. This could result in reduced supplies for the local market.
7. Competition from Ultra Super Critical Coal Power Generation Plants which are cheaper, lesser emissions and higher efficiency.

Way Forward:

- ✓ The key requirements are integrated policies fully supported by States. Industry must get help to set up facilities and avail low cost financing both important elements in China's rise and be able to invest in intellectual property.
- ✓ However, in terms of **manufacturing of solar equipment**, it is dominated by a handful number of countries. India, in order to become a world leader in solar power, cannot just rely on **large scale solar deployment** by importing solar equipment.
- ✓ There is an **immediate necessity** to develop the **entire value chain ecosystem** to become **competitive** and achieve sustainable growth in the long run.
- ✓ **Flexible financing options** for individuals to install rooftop solar installations would also support a faster adoption of clean energy.
- ✓ **Focus on last mile connectivity** in remote areas where developing transmission infrastructure is a challenge through **small solar installations** or solar community grids by using a domestically manufactured product with small power inverters or batteries in every home may be helpful **to ensure power for** all in countries like India.
- ✓ *Rapid progress requires a strategic shift to aid competitive domestic manufacturing*

Link: <https://youtu.be/Pol6ymcV-tc>

4. COVID-19 & Herd immunity

Herd Immunity

- Herd immunity, or community immunity, is when a large part of the population of an area is immune to a specific disease. If enough people are resistant to the cause of a disease, such as a virus or bacteria, it has nowhere to go.
- While not every single individual may be immune, the group as a whole has protection. This is because there are fewer high-risk people overall. The infection rates drop, and the disease peters out.
- Herd immunity protects at-risk populations. These include babies and those whose immune systems are weak and can't get resistance on their own.

How is herd immunity achieved?

There are two paths to herd immunity for COVID-19 — vaccines and infection.

Vaccines

- A vaccine for the virus that causes COVID-19 would be an ideal approach to achieving herd immunity. Vaccines create immunity without causing illness or resulting complications.
- Herd immunity makes it possible to protect the population from a disease, including those who can't be vaccinated, such as newborns or those who have compromised immune systems.
- Using the concept of herd immunity, vaccines have successfully controlled deadly contagious diseases such as smallpox, polio, diphtheria, rubella and many others.
- Reaching herd immunity through vaccination sometimes has drawbacks, though. Protection from some vaccines can wane over time, requiring revaccination. Sometimes people don't get all of the shots that they need to be completely protected from a disease.
- In addition, some people may object to vaccines because of religious objections, fears about the possible risks or skepticism about the benefits. People who object to vaccines often live in the same neighborhoods or attend the same religious services or schools. If the proportion of vaccinated people in a community falls below the herd immunity threshold, exposure to a contagious disease could result in the disease quickly spreading. Measles has recently resurged in several parts of the world with relatively low vaccination rates. Opposition to vaccines can pose a real challenge to herd immunity.

Natural infection

- Herd immunity can also be reached when a sufficient number of people in the population have recovered from a disease and have developed antibodies against future infection.
- For example, those who survived the 1918 flu (influenza) pandemic were later immune to infection with the H1N1 flu, a subtype of influenza A. During the 2009-10 flu season, H1N1 caused the respiratory infection in humans that was commonly referred to as swine flu.
- However, there are some major problems with relying on community infection to create herd immunity to the virus that causes COVID-19. First, it isn't yet clear if infection with the COVID-19 virus makes a person immune to future infection.
- Research suggests that after infection with some coronaviruses, reinfection with the same virus — though usually mild and only happening in a fraction of people — is possible after a period of months or years. Further research is needed to determine the protective effect of antibodies to the virus in those who have been infected.
- Even if infection with the COVID-19 virus creates long-lasting immunity, a large number of people would have to become infected to reach the herd immunity threshold.
- If many people become sick with COVID-19 at once, the health care system could quickly become overwhelmed. This amount of infection could also lead to serious complications and millions of deaths, especially among older people and those who have chronic conditions.

Herd immunity in COVID-19:

1. Over the months, scientists have seen that COVID-19's reproduction number has varied from 1.5 to 3.5 in different parts of the world.
2. And since large-scale surveillance programs have not been done, and since the disease has not run its full course anywhere, experts can only approximate mortality rates from symptomatic patients and not from all those who actually have been infected by the virus.
3. So, after many months, we only have a reasonable understanding of how long the person is infectious and the possible modes of transmission. Some debates about sexual and other possible modes of transmissions, and other disease parameters are still ongoing in the scientific community.
4. But beyond all these, there are big questions still plaguing the scientific community — the longevity of the immunity and how quickly the virus transforms itself through mutations.
5. Since it is still early days, it is not only difficult to determine but would also yield an inaccurate estimate of these two factors. A clear understanding of these aspects is necessary to gear up the systems and take appropriate policy decisions.
6. It may so happen that after several mutations, COVID-19 could behave like the influenza virus that warrants the need for a yearly flu shot, if/when a vaccine becomes available. It must be noted that in case of the yearly flu shot, even though some people have less risk, they are urged to take the shot to achieve and maintain herd immunity so that the risk of spread is minimised.
7. In the absence of a vaccine or drug, and without a clear understanding of the disease pathology, seeking to achieve herd immunity through infection is a dangerous strategy.
8. Allow the disease to spread too quickly, it overwhelms the health system and causes many people to die "unnecessarily"; do it too slowly, and it takes that much longer for life to come back to "normal". Therefore, for almost all countries, at this juncture, it is a cruel choice between saving lives and saving livelihoods.

What Are the Challenges to Developing Herd Immunity to COVID-19?

- The main obstacle to herd immunity to COVID-19 right now is that the virus that causes the disease is "novel," or new. That means that it hasn't infected humans before and everyone is at risk of infection. There's no existing immunity to build on.
- Another potential barrier is that we don't know how strong the immune protection is or how long it will last in people who've had COVID-19. Early research on monkeys showed that they made antibodies to the virus that protected them from a second infection a month later. If the coronavirus is like the flu, we can expect a few months of protection.
- With no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 yet, a large number of people would need to catch the virus, get sick, and recover before we can have herd immunity.

How have we achieved herd immunity for other infectious diseases?

- Measles, mumps, polio, and chickenpox are examples of infectious diseases that were once very common but are now rare because vaccines helped to establish herd immunity.
- Sometimes see outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in communities with lower vaccine coverage because they don't have herd protection
- For infections without a vaccine, even if many adults have developed immunity because of prior infection, the disease can still circulate among children and can still infect those with weakened immune systems. This was seen for many of the aforementioned diseases before vaccines were developed.
- Other viruses (like the flu) mutate over time, so antibodies from a previous infection provide protection for only a short period of time.
- For the flu, this is less than a year. If SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, is like other coronaviruses that currently infect humans, we can expect that people who get infected will be immune for months to years, but probably not their entire lives.

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

5. COVID-19 - Airborne Transmission

Air Borne transmission on coronavirus:

1. After hundreds of experts urged the World Health Organization to review mounting scientific research, the agency acknowledged that airborne transmission of the coronavirus may be a threat in indoor spaces.
2. O. expert committees are going over evidence on transmission of the virus and plan to release updated recommendations in a few days, agency scientists said in a news briefing.
3. The possibility of airborne transmission, especially in “crowded, closed, poorly ventilated settings, cannot be ruled out,” said the W.H.O.’s committee on infection prevention and control.
4. The agency recommends “appropriate and optimal ventilation” of indoor environments, as well as physical distancing.

What are aerosols? How different are they from respiratory droplets?

1. In common understanding, aerosols are minute particles that are expelled under pressure, as in the case of fine mist from a jar of perfume, or a can of roach repellent.
2. However, aerosol is a term used to broadly refer to particles suspended in the air; they could include fine dust, mist, or smoke. In the context of transmission of viruses, as in this case, aerosols are read as micro droplets, much smaller (5 microns or less) than respiratory droplets, and take a longer time to drop to the floor.
3. They will be expelled by people breathing, laughing or singing, as against respiratory droplets that are expelled with forceful acts such as sneezing or coughing. As per the open letter, “at typical indoor air velocities, a 5 micron droplet will travel tens of metres, much greater than the scale of a typical room, while settling from a height of 1.5 m to the floor.”
4. As they remain suspended in the air for longer, an individual who is COVID-19 positive is likely to infect people standing even at a distance of 1-2 m in a small, poorly ventilated room. “This poses the risk that people sharing such environments can potentially inhale these viruses, resulting in infection and disease,” the signatories endorsed.
5. That respiratory droplets transmit COVID-19 infection has dominated the discourse from nearly the beginning of the epidemic, and has guided the path that interventions have taken thus far, including wearing masks, keeping distance, and hand washing routines

Droplet and aerosol transmission:

- One can visualise the difference between a droplet and aerosol is by seeing droplets as big drops and aerosols as small drops.
- In the first case, droplets coming from a sick person’s mouth or nose are heavy, and fall to the ground before they can get much further than six feet. This explains why the government has been insisting on people maintaining over 1.5 metres distance between each other. Aerosols, which are much smaller, can travel longer before landing.
- Aerosols can be imagined to be somewhat like a drunk person walking in a poorly-lit street at night.

Risk indoors:

1. In a poorly ventilated room – a room where the flow is stagnant, small aerosol particles can circulate the room until they find their ‘lamp-post’.
2. The smallest droplets and particles (diameter < 5 μm –10 μm) may remain suspended in the air indefinitely, until they are carried away by a light breeze or ventilation airflow. This could be a wall, furniture or a person’s body thus successfully infecting people. The lifetime of a virus that falls on a surface could be anywhere between a few minutes to a few hours.
3. A recent study published in the journal , it was found that the most infected area was a 1 meter-squared mobile toilet in the patient area.
4. The risk is the highest in air-conditioned rooms, particularly cabins or cage-like rooms.
5. Open the windows and wear your masks

6. Spacious well-ventilated rooms, on the other hand, bear a lesser risk of transmission. This means that an outdoor vegetable market is safer than a supermarket and a supermarket is safer than a small departmental store; this assumes that people maintain physical distancing norms though. So if you are indoors, open the windows to ensure maximum ventilation.

What are the implications of airborne transmission?

- Airborne transmission of this novel coronavirus is potentially a worry, because if it occurs often, it means the virus may be commonly transmitted in the absence of close contact.
- It also raises the possibility the virus may travel on air currents, and even be transmitted through air conditioning.
- This means social distancing may not always be effective, and in particular, crowded indoor areas with poor ventilation pose a major threat.

Link: <https://youtu.be/o51Ag4jXZxo>

6. SCIENCE MONITOR

1. Nano coated filter by IIT- Madras

1. Indian Institute of Technology Madras Researchers have developed a nano-coated filter media for healthcare workers treating COVID-19 Patients.
2. This filter has applications not only in healthcare but also has defence applications and other places where air filtration of submicron particles is required.
3. This nano-coated filter media has been fabricated by a nylon-based polymer coating on cellulose paper and was developed through the electrospinning process. The coating properties are optimized for efficient removal of sub-micron sized dust particles in the air.
4. The nano-coated filter media is in the process of being field tested in practical applications. Upon validation through field trials, it will be recommended for bulk manufacturing through industry collaborations.
5. This pioneering work is funded by Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) for defence applications and due to its high potential for the need of the hour, it is repositioned in health care applications.
6. **The Practical Applications of this nano-coated filter media include:**
 - a. Face masks with an enhanced particle filtration efficiency
 - b. Respirator devices
 - c. Air purification system in operation theatres of hospitals
 - d. Cabin air filters for the comfort and health of air passengers
 - e. Air filters for the armoured vehicle engines
 - f. Computer hard disk drive filters, and
 - g. Pneumatic equipment.
7. The current status of project is that the researchers are trying to optimize the coating parameters of nanomaterials for bulk manufacturing at an affordable cost and testing the antiviral properties for broader utilization in various applications. Also, attempts are being made to develop composite nano-coated filter media having more than one nanomaterial coating with the possibility of manufacturing multi-layered masks.

2. ZyCoV-D

- Zydus has already manufactured clinical good manufacturing practice (GMP) batches of the vaccine candidate and plans to initiate the clinical trials in July 2020 across multiple sites in India in over 1,000 subjects.

- ZyCoV-D, developed at the company's Vaccine Technology Centre in Ahmedabad, has now received permission from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) – Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to initiate phase I/II human clinical trials in India, Cadila Healthcare said in a regulatory filing.
- In animal studies, the vaccine was found to elicit a strong immune response in multiple animal species like mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits. The antibodies produced by the vaccine were able to completely neutralise the wild type virus in virus neutralisation assay indicating the protective potential of the vaccine candidate, it said.
- It further said no safety concerns were observed for the vaccine candidate in repeat-dose toxicology studies by both intramuscular and intradermal routes of administration. In rabbits, up to three times the intended human dose was found to be safe, well-tolerated and immunogenic.
- The company claimed that the vaccine candidate has no vector response and with the absence of any infectious agent, the platform provides ease of manufacturing the vaccine with minimal biosafety requirements.
- It is also known to show much-improved vaccine stability and lower cold chain requirements making it easy for transportation to remotest parts of the country, it said.
- The company now intends to rapidly ramp up the production capacities of ZyCoV-D at multiple sites and facilities to cater to Indian and global demand.

3. World Zoonoses Day

1. It is held every year on July 6. The day commemorates July 6, 1885, when Louis Pasteur successfully administered the first vaccine against Rabies virus, a zoonotic disease. Theme day raises awareness for the risk of zoonotic diseases.
2. Zoonoses are infectious diseases (virus, bacteria and parasites) that can be spread from animals to humans, and vice versa. Zoonoses can spread from direct contact with animals or indirectly, vector-borne or food-borne.
3. Zoonotic diseases are very common, for example tick-borne encephalitis and borreliosis. But also many foodborne infectious diseases like salmonella, Yersinia, EHEC, botulism or campylobacter are all also zoonoses.
4. How to avoid zoonotic diseases?
 - a. Good hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and clean water
 - b. Preventive clothing for bites from mosquitoes, ticks and fleas
 - c. Store and handle food safely and cook properly
 - d. Avoid bites and scratches from animals

4. Air Borne transmission on coronavirus

1. After hundreds of experts urged the World Health Organization to review mounting scientific research, the agency acknowledged that airborne transmission of the coronavirus may be a threat in indoor spaces.
2. H.O. expert committees are going over evidence on transmission of the virus and plan to release updated recommendations in a few days, agency scientists said in a news briefing.
3. The possibility of airborne transmission, especially in "crowded, closed, poorly ventilated settings, cannot be ruled out," said the W.H.O.'s committee on infection prevention and control.
4. The agency recommends "appropriate and optimal ventilation" of indoor environments, as well as physical distancing.

Link: https://youtu.be/G_Q95RveUeU?list=PLVOgwA_DiGzpd3_Iz7J-81Vh4QqU-ZGA9

5. Covaxin

1. It is **India's first COVID vaccine candidate** approved by the **Drug Controller General of India (DCGI)**.
2. Covaxin is **an inactivated vaccine created from a strain of the infectious SARS COV-2 virus**.
3. It is **the first vaccine that has got approval of the drug controller for phase 1 and II human clinical trials**.

4. A vaccine usually goes through three phases of human trials. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation has given approvals for phase I and II trials so far. According to details from CTRI, BBIL in its application estimated phase I and II trials to take a year and three months, including at least a month for phase I alone
5. India's indigenous coronavirus vaccine being developed by Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has entered the first phase of human trials. While the Phase-1 human clinical trials for Covaxin has already begun at the Nizams Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) in Hyderabad, AIIMS Delhi has recruited candidates who would undergo trials.
6. The company is also involved in the development of **CoroFlu**, a nasal vaccine for COVID-19, as part of an international collaboration of virologists at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and vaccine firm FluGen.

6. Annual TB Report 2020:

1. The **Annual TB Report** is prepared and published by the Central TB Division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GOI.
2. **04 lakh notified TB patients in 2019** in India, which is a **14% increase from 2018**.
3. **Reduction in the number of missing cases** to 2.9 lakh cases as against more than 10 lakhs in 2017.
4. **Private sector notifications increased** by 35% with 6.78 lakh TB patients notified.
5. **Proportion of children diagnosed with TB increased** to 8% in 2019 compared to 6% in 2018.
6. **Provision of HIV testing for all notified TB patients increased** from 67% in 2018 to 81% in 2019.
7. Expansion of treatment services has resulted in a **12% improvement in the treatment success rate of notified patients**. For 2019, it is 81% compared to 69% in 2018.

7. Diabetes Retinopathy

1. The Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati (IIT Guwahati) and Shri Sankaradeva Nethralaya Guwahati, have jointly developed a testing device to detect diabetic retinopathy at an early stage without the need of invasive testing.
2. The device comprises a small plate containing microchannels for guidance of fluids. The team has also filed an Indian patent for this idea and device.
3. Diabetic retinopathy is a serious non-communicable disease in India. It is caused by abnormal growth in the retinal blood vessels in people with diabetes and is usually worsened when the person is on insulin for diabetic treatment.
4. Currently, the first step in the test for diabetic retinopathy is an invasive eye exam, in which the eyes are dilated and the ophthalmologist inspects the eye.

8. This Drug Discovery Hackathon 2020

1. It is a joint initiative of MHRD's Innovation Cell (MIC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and supported by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC), MyGov as well as private players.
2. This Hackathon is first of its kind National initiative for supporting drug discovery process and will see participation from professionals, faculty, researchers and students from varied fields like Computer Science, Chemistry, Pharmacy, Medical Sciences, Basic Sciences and Biotechnology.
3. The Hackathon consists of challenges that are posted as problem statements and, are based on specific drug discovery topics which, are open to the participants to solve. A total of 29 Problem Statements (PS) have been identified.
4. MyGov portal is being used and any Indian student can participate.
5. Professionals and researchers from anywhere in the world can participate.
6. The Hackathon will have three Tracks. **Track 1 will primarily deal with drug design for anti-COVID-19 hit/lead generation:** this is done using tools such as molecular modelling, pharmacophore optimization, molecular docking, hit/lead optimization, etc.
7. **Track 2 will deal with designing/optimizing new tools and algorithms** which will have an immense impact on expediting the process of in silico drug discovery.

8. There is also a **third track called “Moon shot** “which allows for working on problems which are ‘out of the box’ nature.

Link: <https://youtu.be/cgJEK3g2kkc>

INSIGHTSIAS

UPSC IAS ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES

Write an **essay** on the following topics in **not** more than **1000-1200 words**:

“When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.”

<https://youtu.be/F1yWqsMCjrk>

“The human spirit must prevail over technology”


<https://youtu.be/GYPlmvC65S4>

“Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance”

<https://youtu.be/WKqgBsGdXiU>

“In a democracy, the individual enjoys not only the ultimate power but carries the ultimate responsibility.”

<https://youtu.be/YJN8fcJtvr0>

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