

7 PM COMPILATION

16th to 31st May, 2021

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Why Arabian Sea is transforming into a New Cyclonic Hotbed? – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The Arabian Sea used to be cyclone shy! But it is changing now, and changing fast! Cyclones are among the most devastating extreme weather events that India faces every year. The strong winds and heavy rains that accompany cyclones cause immense loss of life and property along the coastline of India. Approximately 1.4 lakh people died by cyclones, floods, and other weather extremes during the past five decades.

The recent formation of Cyclone Tauktae makes 2021 the fourth consecutive year to witness an Arabian Sea cyclone during the pre-monsoon season (April–June). The changing climate and rising global warming have converted the Arabian Sea into a new hotbed for cyclonic activities. Earlier the majority of the cyclones used to occur in the Bay of Bengal.

Current Scenario

- [Cyclone Tauktae](#) developed over the Arabian Sea on May 14, 2021, and got converted into a very severe cyclonic storm (VSCS) on May 16, 2021. It is expected to hit southern Gujarat on May 18, 2021.
- In recent years, strong cyclones have been developing on the Arabian Sea more frequently than earlier.

About Tropical Cyclones

They are violent storms that originate over oceans in tropical areas.

They create a whirl in the atmosphere with very strong winds circulating around it. The direction is anticlockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere.

The pressure gradient falls towards the center from all directions and therefore winds try to converge towards the center from all directions.

They develop in the North Indian Ocean region (Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea) during the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon (October to December) periods. May-June and October-November are known to produce cyclones of severe intensity that affect the Indian coasts.

It is anticipated that **around 76 per cent** of India's coastline is susceptible to cyclones and tsunamis.

Conditions for Formation of Tropical Cyclones:

A consistent source of heat as [tropical cyclones](#) are thermally induced low-pressure systems. Large sea surface with a temperature higher than 27° C which is possible only during the late summers i.e. September, October, and November

Presence of the Coriolis force. It is the result of the earth's rotation and deflects objects to the right in the Northern Hemisphere and to the left in the Southern Hemisphere.

Small variations in the vertical wind speed.

A pre-existing weak low-pressure area or low-level-cyclonic circulation;

Upper divergence above the sea level system.

Past Trend of Cyclonic Activities

- The Arabian Sea has been comparatively [less prone to cyclonic storms](#) than the Bay of Bengal. In the usual course, there was an occurrence of one extremely severe cyclone every four-five years in the Arabian Sea.
- During the period 1891-2000, nearly 308 tropical cyclones crossed the east coast, of which 103 were severe in intensity. Similarly, 48 cyclones crossed the west coast of which 24 were severe.

Reasons behind past trends

- **First, high sea surface temperatures along with high humidity** in the Bay of Bengal triggers extremely strong cyclones.
- **Second, sluggish winds along with warm air currents** in the Bay of Bengal keep temperatures relatively high.
- **Third, the constant inflow of freshwater** from the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers makes it impossible for the warm water to mix with the cooler water below.
- **Fourth, cyclonic winds easily move into the Bay of Bengal** due to the presence of moisture sources from rivers and **the absence of any large landmass.**
- **Fifth, the Arabian Sea receives stronger winds** that help dissipate the heat, and the lack of constant freshwater supply helps the warm water mix with the cool water thereby reducing the temperature.
 - Almost 50% of the storms don't sustain as the west-central and the north Arabian Sea have a colder sea temperature than other adjacent regions.
- However, this trend is changing, with a greater number of cyclones being developed in the Arabian Sea.

Reasons behind increasing cyclonic activities in the Arabian Sea

- Annually, five cyclones on average used to form in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea combined. Among these, four develop in the Bay of Bengal and one in the Arabian Sea.
- Previously, tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea were restricted to Gujarat. However, now even Kerala and Karnataka have also become more vulnerable to cyclones. [A recent example is 'Ockhi'](#).
- Tauktae is the fourth cyclone in consecutive years to have developed in the Arabian Sea. Cyclone Mekanu hit Oman in 2018, Cyclone Vāyu struck Gujarat in 2019 and Cyclone Nisarga hit Maharashtra in 2020.
- **Apart from frequency, a rise in the intensification rate** is also observed. All these cyclones since 2018 have been categorised either 'Severe Cyclone' or above.
 - Tauktae took only 2 days to become VSCS while Cyclone Mekanu and Cyclone Nisarga had developed slower, taking 4 and 5 days respectively.

Reasons behind changing trends

- **First, sea surface temperatures** in the Arabian Sea have increased rapidly during the past century due to **global warming**. Temp. now is 1.2–1.4 °C higher than the temperature witnessed four decades ago. These warmer temperatures support active convection, heavy rainfall, and intense cyclones.
- **Second, the rising temperature** is also enabling the Arabian Sea to supply ample energy for the intensification of cyclones. Currently, seawater up to depths of 50 metres has been very warm that allowed Cyclone tauktae to become a VSCS in only 2 days.
- **Third, the Arabian Sea is also providing conducive wind shear** for cyclones. For instance, a higher level easterly wind drove the depression of Cyclone Ockhi from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea.
- **Fourth, greater occurrence of El Niño Modoki.** It is a climate phenomenon that means 'pseudo El Niño' and creates conditions that are not conducive for cyclogenesis in the Bay of Bengal. However, this condition is conducive for the formation of cyclones in the Arabian Sea.
 - El Niño is associated with suppressing cyclone formation in the Arabian Sea.

Concerns associated with changing trends

- **Covid management:** There is a concern about the impact of the cyclonic storm on the battle against Covid-19. The rain and flooding may set back social distancing and other necessary measures at evacuation centres and relief camps.
- **Delay in Monsoon:** The cyclone Tauktae is expected to interfere with the normal progression of the Indian Monsoon by sucking all the moisture from the monsoon winds towards itself. The strong low-pressure areas at their core induce the surrounding winds to rush towards them.
- **Rise in Extreme Rainfall events:** Widespread extreme rainfall events that cause floods have also increased by threefold over India, in response to Arabian Sea warming. This has deeply impacted the lives, livelihood, infrastructure and ecology of the region.
- **Forecasting Challenge:** The new trend is encouraging more and more rapid intensification of cyclones. State-of-the-art cyclone models are unable to pick this rapid intensification because they do not incorporate the ocean dynamics accurately.

Initiatives towards Cyclones

- Government is carrying out a [National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project \(NCRMP\)](#) with the help of the World Bank to upgrade cyclone forecasting, tracking, and warning systems in India
- The government is also implementing the **Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (ICZMP)** to improve national capacity for the implementation of comprehensive coastal management in India.
- Lastly, Government also separated **Structural (includes construction) and non-structural** measures for effective disaster management of cyclones.

Suggestions

- The cyclones must be closely monitored at higher resolution and accuracy using on-site platforms such as buoys and moorings.
 - A buoy is a type of object that floats in water and is used in the middle of the seas as locators or as warning points for ships.
 - A mooring is any permanent structure to which a vessel may be secured.
- The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) must be provided with greater autonomy, finance, and human resources. This would improve the collection and dissemination of data on cyclonic events.
- There must be an incorporation of the global warming signals in the weather models that can help tackle the challenges of intense cyclones in the future.

Conclusion

Climate projections indicate that the Arabian Sea will continue warming due to increasing carbon emissions, resulting in more intense cyclones in the future. This calls for strengthening the disaster management framework in consonance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

India's policy on Israel and Palestine – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

India's policy on Israel and Palestine faces hindrances due to the Israel-Palestine dispute. This dispute is one of the world's longest-running and most controversial conflicts. It is a conflict between two self-determination movements — the Jewish nationalist project and the Palestinian nationalist project, in the same territory.

This [Israel-Palestine dispute](#) has far-reaching impacts on India's foreign policy on them. India's close diplomatic relationship with Israel is vital for India's national interest. But at the same time, India cannot alter its long-standing commitment to the rights of Palestine. With the recent dispute, India's more balanced and pragmatic approach to the Israel Palestine dispute faces another challenge.

Historical aspects of India's policy on Israel and Palestine

1. During our freedom struggle itself India's policy on Palestine and Israel had taken shape.
2. In 1938 there was a **proposal to create a homeland for Jews in Palestine**. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his views on the proposal as, "my sympathy for the Jews does not blind me to the requirements of Justice. It is wrong and **inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs**'.
3. After Independence, In 1947, India **voted against the partition of Palestine** at the United Nations General Assembly. Also, Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and **refused to have full diplomatic relations with Israel**.
4. During the formation of the **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)** in 1964, India supported the formation. India even mentioned Palestine has the right to create an organisation supporting the formation of Palestine. This made India the **first non-Arab country to recognise PLO** as the sole representative of the Palestine.
5. In the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967, the UN adopted Resolution 242. During that process, India supported the Palestine cause.
6. India was one of the first countries to **recognise the State of Palestine** in 1988.

India's policy on Israel and Palestine post-1992

1. India **established full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992**. But at the same time, India supported the Palestinian cause.
2. After the Oslo Peace accord in 1993, a self Government body named Palestine Authority (PA) was created. Soon after that, India opened a Representative Office for it in Gaza. This office was later shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
3. In 1997 the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) visited India. During the visit, he laid the foundation stone of an auditorium built by the **Indo-Arab League in Hyderabad**.
4. **India voted in favour** of accepting **Palestine as a full member of UNESCO in 2011**.
5. In 2014, India supported the **UNHRC's resolution to probe Israel's human rights violations** in Gaza. But in the next year, India abstained from voting against Israel in UNHRC.

Recent Israel-Palestine dispute and India's stand on it

Recently Israeli armed forces have penetrated [Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Haram esh-Sharif in Jerusalem](#). Hamas retaliated [by firing rockets on Israel](#). In retaliation, Israeli airstrikes targeted the Gaza Strip. This invoked the Indian response to the Israel-Palestine dispute once again. The India's stand can be observed by following points,

1. **Not resolutely standing with Israel:** Recently, the Israeli Prime Minister mentioned the 25 countries that support Israeli actions. The countries include United States, Albania, etc. But India was not among the list of 25 countries.
2. **Concern towards Palestine:** India expressed deep concern over the violence in Jerusalem. Especially on Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount that too in the holy month of Ramzan.
3. **Advocating Status-quo:** India urged both sides to “refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status quo”. Further, India also demanded, “the **historic status quo** at the holy places of Jerusalem, including Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount **must be respected**”.
4. **Respecting the sentiments of both Israel and Palestine:** India in its official statement mentioned both the “**Haram esh-Sharif and Temple Mount**”. This is a symbol of mutual respect by India on the religious sentiments of Israel and Palestine.
 - According to the Palestinian narrative, they only maintain Haram esh-Sherif. i.e exclusive Islamic control and ownership.
 - On the other hand, the Israelis mention only Temple Mount. i.e exclusive control and ownership of Jews.
5. All these **signifies India's commitment towards its de-hyphenation policy** on Israel and Palestine

India's de-hyphenation policy on Israel and Palestine

As a part of the **Link West Policy**, India has de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine. It means India's relationship with Israel will depend upon its own merits. Also, it will be independent and separate from India's relationship with the Palestinians. In simple terms, it means, India will have its bilateral strategic ties with Israel irrespective of its political stance on the Israel-Palestine issue. Instead, India will treat both countries as **mutually independent and exclusive**. The developments under this phase are,

1. No Indian PM has visited Israel supporting the Palestinian cause. But the de-hyphenation policy enabled the **first Indian PM visit to Israel** in 2017. During the visit, both countries signed 7 MoUs. This includes sectors such as Agriculture, Water Conservation, India-Israel Industrial Research and Development and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F), etc.
2. To commemorate 25 years of Indian-Israeli relations, the Israeli Prime Minister visited India in 2018. During that, he honoured the Indian soldiers who perished in the Battle of Haifa during World War I.
3. So far India has maintained the image of a **historical moral supporter for Palestinian self-determination**. At the same time, the **policy of de-hyphenation allowed India to engage** in the military, economic, and other strategic relations **with Israel**.
4. India voted for a resolution **criticising the U.S. for recognizing Jerusalem as the Israeli capital**. This reassured India's principle on long-standing policy on Palestine.

Reason for India's de-hyphenation policy on Israel and Palestine

1. **India's Link West Policy:** India depends on Middle Eastern countries for Oil and Gas imports. Also, the majority of 13.6 million NRIs living in the Middle East. Moreover, approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian origin in Israel. This required an enhanced engagement of India in West Asia. So the policy of de-hyphenation is essential to protect the Indian Interest in the region.
2. **India's support for a two-state solution:** The "two-state solution" is based on a UN resolution of 1947. The solution maintains **Israel and Palestine are two different nations**. India being a supporter of a two-state solution maintains the bilateral disputes should be resolved through direct negotiations and solutions must be acceptable by both. This helped India to maintain its support for the Palestinian cause and at the same time engage with Israel.
3. **The untapped potential of India-Israel relations:** After India engaged with Israel, India-Israel relations reached new heights. The relationship is steadily growing, and the relations extended to the economic, military, and strategic relationship. But still, the full potential of relations was not realised. A few example of present relations are,
 - Today Israel is the **third-largest defence supplier to India** and India accounts for over 40% of Israel's defence exports.
 - Israel has become one of the foremost technology superpowers in areas such as **rainwater harvesting, water conservation and dryland agriculture**. India can learn such techniques only if it has close cooperation.
 - India can scale up the role of Israeli firms in cleaning up other rivers. For example, the recent Delhi government agreement signed an agreement to clean up an eight km stretch of the Yamuna.
 - So, by engaging with Israel, India can utilise the full potential of India-Israel relations.
4. **Problems within the PLO:** The **PLO faced challenges with FATAH**(a small group of radical organisation within PLO) **and Hamas** in the region. For example, In 2006 Hamas dominated the Gaza Strip region and FATAH ruled the west bank. This resulted in the **slow progress of Palestine-Israel negotiations**. India, being a supporter of the Palestinian cause, suffered from the problems within PLO. This reduced India's engagement with united Palestine and Israel. But with the advent of de-hyphenation India balanced both the delayed progress of Palestine and relations with Israel.

Challenges with India's de-hyphenation policy on Israel and Palestine

1. **Difficult to delink Israel-Palestine dispute:** India is facing various challenges in delinking Israel Palestine dispute from India's foreign policy. For example,
 - With the recent Israel attack on Haram esh-Sharif, India cannot condemn Israel or favour Palestine as India maintain diplomatic relations with both.
 - Israel's politics dominated by its hostile attitude towards the Palestinians. This makes it difficult for India to take a stand on various issues.
 - Further, **Israel wants India to end its pro-Palestine policy**. Considering India's engagement with Israel, India can't ignore Israel too.
2. **Balancing other regional ties in West Asia:** India maintains more active diplomatic relations with Israel and the US. But this might impact India's relations with other countries in the region. For example, Saudi has not yet recognised Israel as a country and Iran supports the Palestinian cause. Any direct relations with Israel will affect our relationship with these countries.

Suggestions to improve India's policy on Israel and Palestine

1. **Reassert India's role to Israel:** India has to make clear statements to Israel that India will never give up its support for Palestine. Further, India has to explain that India looks at the Israel-Palestine dispute as a dispute between two nations. So, Israel cannot force India to end the pro-Palestine policy.
2. **Implementing the Two-state solution:** Both Israel and Palestine should immediately resume the peace talks under the guidance of the UNSC. India and other nations can aid the peace process. India can help Israel and Palestine to work on creating a sovereign Israel and Palestine. This will satisfy long-standing India's political commitment to Palestine.
3. **Solving the PLO problems:** The PLO has to understand the unity of Hamas, Fatah in creating a Palestine. Recently, Hamas agreed to talks with Fatah. The PLO has to utilise this opportunity and has to work on establishing a sovereign Palestine.
4. India has so far been successful in balancing its interests in West Asia, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Apart from that, India so far never took sides with neither of the conflicting nations in the region. The world at large needs to come together for a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine dispute. This will end India's long-standing support to Palestine and will also favour closer India-Israel relations and India-Palestine relations.

Brain drain in the health sector – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

India is facing a health emergency due to Covid-19 Pandemic. At present, India is registering a little less than 3 lakh cases and more than 4,000 deaths in a day. Now, India is also undertaking one of the largest vaccination programs in the world. Management of this huge task would not have been possible without the contribution of health workers. The contribution of Indian health care workers amid the pandemic is extremely commendable.

However, India is facing a shortage of health workers at this crucial point in time. The present workforce is overburdened with their work for more than a year. A part of this problem is due to a large-scale brain drain in the health sector. If India was able to retain its workforce, India's health sector would have been in a better position now.

Status of brain drain in the health sector in India

As per government reports, India has 1.7 nurses per 1,000 population and a doctor to patient ratio of 1:1404. But both of these are well below the WHO norms. The WHO recommends three nurses per 1,000 population and a doctor to patient ratio of 1:1100. The distribution of doctors and nurses is also heavily skewed in favour of some regions. Higher concentration present in some urban pockets. Brain drain in the health sector is also the reason for this.

- For several decades, India has been a **major exporter of healthcare workers** to developed nations. Indian health care workers are highly prevalent in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Europe, and other English-speaking countries.
- As per OECD data, around 69,000 Indian-trained doctors and 56,000 Indian-trained nurses worked in the UK, US, Canada, and Australia in 2017.
- There is also a large-scale migration of health workers from India to the GCC countries. But there is no credible data available.
- The British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO) estimates that the UK alone has more than 40,000 Indian doctors.

According to the FICCI, The UK and the US are the top two destinations for foreign-trained doctors. Canada and Australia are other preferred destinations. Many developed and Gulf countries provide the red carpet for the best Indian doctors and nurses. India on the other hand not only facing [challenges in retaining health professionals](#) and also facing huge demand and supply gap in Doctors, nurses in rural areas.

Reasons for brain drain in the health sector

Like any migration trends, the migration of health professionals also has both push and pull factors.

Push factors

- **Low Wages:** Developed countries offer better wages compare to India. For example, nurses in India receive low wages in private sector outfits. Also, they have only less opportunity in the public sector (Low employment due to lower hospitals in the public sector). So, they generally migrate to developed countries that offer better wages.
- **Lack of government investment in health care:** India's health care investment to GDP ratio is just 1.2 per cent. This is the lowest figure if we compare spending by

OECD and BRICS nations. This reduces better employment opportunities for health professionals.

- **Lack of health care educational Institutions:** India only has around 550 institutions for MBBS education. So, Many Indian students prefer to study abroad due to high course fees, limited seats in government medical colleges, etc. Once they study abroad they prefer to pursue higher studies or practice abroad alone. China is attracting a lot of Indian students in this regard.
- **Other factors:** This includes unethical practices of some Indian private hospitals, lack of government policy to protect the vulnerable is also a reason for a health care worker to move abroad.
- Pull factors
- **Access to advanced technology:** Developed countries offer better opportunities to pursue research in health care. Health care professionals also get access to advance technology, research facilities and even get higher scholarship amounts for their research.
- **Better standard of living and life quality:** Many developed and GCCs offer a higher salary, tax benefits, higher standard of living, etc. These act as a pull factor for Indian health care professionals.
- **Policies of developed countries:** Developed countries adopted **migrant-friendly policies towards health care professionals**. For example, with the onset of the pandemic, there is a greater demand for healthcare workers across the world. The developed countries implemented various policies to retain health care employees. Such as,
 - OECD countries **exempted travel bans** for the health professionals with job offers.
 - Some countries **processed visa applications** of healthcare workers even during the lockdown period.
 - The UK has granted **free one-year visa extensions** to healthcare workers and their dependents
 - France has **offered citizenship** to frontline immigrant healthcare workers during the pandemic.

Government measures to tackle the brain drain in the health sector

The government introduced many schemes to retain the brain drain in the health sector. For example,

- **Stopped issuing NORI certificates:** In 2014, India stopped issuing No Objection to Return to India (NORI) certificates to doctors migrating to the US. The US government requires a **NORI certificate for doctors who seek to extend their stay beyond three years**. As India stopped issuing these certificates, the **Indian doctors will have to return to India** after three years.
- **Inclusion of nurses in the Emigration Check Required (ECR) category:** This policy requires **nurses recruitment** from other countries to be done **only through the six state-related employment agencies**. Further, this also makes it **mandatory for the nurses to accept international contracts that are approved by the government**. This increases the transparency in nursing recruitment and reduces the exploitation of nurses in the destination countries.
- But these policies fail to stop the brain drain from India and not focus on the long-term prevention of brain drain.

Suggestions to reduce brain drain in the health sector

National level practices:

1. **Adequate investment in the health sector:** Indian Budget 2021 aims to increase the Health sector spending from 1.2 percent to 2.5 percent in three years. This will increase adequate health infrastructure, adequate employment opportunities, etc.
2. **Creating adequate health care institutions:** The government has to allow private medical educational institutes to open up medical colleges along with capping the maximum fee per seat. Further, the government can ease land requirement norms for medical and nursing colleges and ease the teachers per students ratio for post-graduate medical courses.
3. **Bringing in cutting-edge technology labs:** The government has to create more cutting-edge research facilities to bring back health care professionals to India. For example, About 20 NRI doctors from the US and Europe relocated to Kolkata to set up the West bank Hospital as it has high-tech equipment and facilities.
4. The government also has to **regulate any unethical practices**, exploitation of nurses in private hospitals in India. The government can even incentives the whistleblowers of such malpractices by amending the whistleblowers' Act.
5. **Engage in bilateral agreements:** The government can sign bilateral agreements with countries like the US, the UK, Canada, Australia towards working on a policy of "brain-share". For example, destination countries would be obliged to supply healthcare workers to India in times of need, crisis situations like a pandemic, etc.

Global level changes

1. **Creating a code of conduct for ethical recruitment:** The global countries have to come together and create a consensus code for ethically recruiting health care professionals. This will reduce the exploitation of health care worker abroad.
2. **Facilitating circular migration:** Almost 37 percent of health care workers concentrated in North and South American countries. But they share only 10% of the global disease burden. On the other hand, countries in Africa and Asia share more disease burden and less health care worker presence. So, the world nations have to come together and facilitate circular migration of health care professionals in terms of crisis situations.

Conclusion

India needs systematic changes such as increased investment in health infrastructure, ensuring decent pay to workers and building an overall environment to retain health care professionals. With the advent of the pandemic, India can [import medical oxygen](#), import vaccine, but India cannot import health professionals. So, It is high time for Indian government to not only increase public spending but also increase the Doctor and nurses ratio and prevent brain drain in the health sector

Creation of New Districts in India: Pros and Cons – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

Historically the district, in some form or the other, has been the most important unit of administration in the Indian sub-continent. According to “Know India”, a website run by the Government of India, there are 718 Districts in India at present. This is more than double the number of districts in India in the 1971 Census. Further, new districts are getting added to the Indian political map every year by citing governance and administration-related issues.

According to the 2011 Census, between 2001-2011 alone as many as 46 districts were added within that time. Since the 2011 Census, approximately 100 districts were added in India. Recently Punjab Chief Minister has declared Malerkotla as the [23rd district of the Punjab](#) State. In this article, we will explain the procedure, pros, and cons of creating new districts in India.

Present status of creation of new districts

1. Since the 1971 [Census](#), the average district size is getting smaller and smaller. In **1981 Census India has only 412 districts**, with the average size of the district was 7,788 sq. km. But in the **2011 Census, India had 640 districts** with the average size of the district just 4,948 sq. km.
2. The trend shows that the states want smaller districts. This trend is in continuation since the 2011 Census also. [The 2021 Census is yet to happen](#). However, as per reports, since the 2011 Census, approximately 100 new districts were added.
3. The surge in a number of districts is mostly due to the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into A.P. and Telangana in 2014. Telangana at present has 33 districts and A.P. has 13 districts.

The trends in creation of new district in India

1. The idea behind creating new districts is generally to provide effective governance. However, it is sometimes driven by local demands.
2. The number and size of districts vary from state to state.
3. The larger states predictably have a higher number of districts. For example, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of districts (75). This is followed by Madhya Pradesh (52).
4. The smallest state, Goa has the least number of districts(2).
5. However, the number of districts in a state is not always a function of the area of the state, or of its population. For example, Andhra Pradesh is the 7th largest state by area but has only 13 districts. On the other hand, Arunachal Pradesh has 25 districts.
6. Most of the Northeastern states have smaller districts.

Procedure for creation of new districts in India

1. The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the **State governments**. This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly.
2. The many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.
3. **Role of Center in the creation of Districts:**
 1. The **Centre has no role to play** in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones. States are free to decide on this matter.

2. If the state government wants to change the name of a district or a railway station, then the Home Ministry comes into the picture.
3. The State government will propose a new name to a district and forward the proposal to the Home ministry. The Home Ministry will forward the proposal to other departments.
4. After that, the departments such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences, and the Railway Ministry, provide their clearance to the proposal of the state government.
5. After examination of their replies, the state government receives a no-objection certificate. Then the name of the district stand changed.

Advantages of creation of new districts in India

1. **Better administration and governance:** This is one of the foremost advantages stated by state governments during the creation of new districts. To some extent, it is also true.
2. **The smaller district ensures better governance:** New districts will host a range of administrative machinery in the district. This will result in better implementation of government schemes, proper fund utilisation, enhanced people coverage of scheme, etc. All this will improve governance in the new district.
3. **Service to the increased population:** Since 1981, the average district area has become 44% smaller in 2019. But, the average number of people in a district has risen from 16.6 lakh to 18.6 lakh in 2019. So the new districts can ensure better service delivery for the increased population.
4. **Bring administration closer to the people:** Bigger districts hinder the administration process in some areas of that district itself. For example, before the bifurcation of the Amravati district, the **farthest taluka was around 150 km from the district headquarters**. So, people, administrative officers in taluka has to travel nearly 3 hours to district headquarters. A new district can bring administration closer to the people.
5. **District-specific government initiatives:** New districts might attract more district-specific schemes. For example, the government can set up an agricultural research and assistance centre or a residential school for gifted children. The state government can provide better funding for backward districts. This will benefit the local population.
6. **Increase employment:** Since the new district will require new officials from top-down, this will increase the employment in government directly. It will also spur employment opportunities indirectly. For example, government tender and associated employment for locals, new shops and services near government buildings, etc.

Challenges in the creation of new districts in India

Creating a number of districts without any rationale can be challenging. This is due to various reasons such as,

1. **The very process of creating one district is challenging:** The government has to find office space for different departments and fill many new positions. All this will require a **huge government exchequer**. The government will also face challenges with land acquisition.
2. **Substitute for genuine decentralisation:** Zilla parishad and the Panchayat samitis do not enjoy a lot of powers in many states. So, these officials **take most of their**

grievances to the collector. Creating smaller districts without empowering these bodies is against decentralisation in the real sense.

3. **The increased cost of living in new districts:** The growth centres created in new district headquarters will also make the **land rates and other service costs go up**. This will increase the cost of living in the new district headquarters in long run.
4. **Political motive:** Many states reorganise the existing districts and form new ones due to political motive. For example, new districts containing a support base of the ruling party can increase will be advantageous for it.
5. **Under utilisation of administration:** If the district is too small, then the administration and associated machinery will be underutilized. Further, the creation of more and smaller districts will also make the management of districts harder for states.
6. The [2nd Administrative Reforms Commission](#) stated that the political gains from forming a new district are a “**minor dividend**” and not the major one.

Suggestions

1. **Ensure proper decentralisation:** Instead of creating new districts every time, the State governments might **reform their decentralisation policy**. As the Panchayats and Zillas face many [challenges in their functioning](#). If the state government provide more powers this will improve better functioning of Panchayats and Zilla Parishad. For example,
 - Creation of SFCs(**State Finance Commission**) properly and allocating funds properly.
 - Widening their tax base and provide **access to the Capital market to raise funds**.
 - State Governments **should provide local bodies with the power to recruit personnel** to fulfil their functions properly.
2. **Guidelines for the formation of new districts:** With new districts are added every year, the Center may prescribe certain criteria for the formation of a new district. For example, the Center may release a guideline that contains the minimum area of the district, its population, etc.
3. **Work on other alternatives:** Instead of creating new infrastructure the States may conduct special camps, frequent field visits from officials. This will not only save the government exchequer but also serve the majority of the administrative and governance targets.

Conclusion

Districts are the third tier of India's governance structure, after the Centre and the state. Smaller districts are definitely better in terms of service delivery. But there is always a limit in the formation of new districts for solving administrative and governance issues.

After the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, Panchayats and Zillas became the de-facto third tier. So, the state governments have to focus on **providing adequate powers** to them for solving the administrative and governance challenges. This will not require any additional funding for creating infrastructure and can provide administration to the doorstep.

Biomedical Waste Management during pandemic – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

Prior to the pandemic, India's biomedical waste management capacity was already limited. Now, with the advent of the pandemic, biomedical waste generation has increased manifold. CPCB has given guidelines to discard the biomedical waste generated in Covid-19 camps and Covid-related material such as gloves and masks in households. However, the implementation of the guidelines is limited as local bodies are not equipped to handle biomedical waste, and even the public doesn't have enough knowledge about segregating it. All this is leading to the piling up of biomedical waste.

According to the **environment ministry**, nearly **146 tonnes of biomedical waste** is generated per day in the country due to diagnostic activities and treatment of Covid-19 patients. Since India is fighting with the second wave of Covid-19 and still producing and using numerous masks, Personal Protection Equipments, etc. the medical waste generation is going to increase further. So, India needs practical solutions to tackle this silent menace created by the pandemic.

Biomedical waste generation during the pandemic

1. According to the **Indian Medical Association (IMA)**, the quantity of **Biomedical wastes generated per day in the country has almost doubled** from 7.22 lakh kg in pre-Covid times to nearly 14 lakh kg now. This rise in waste generation is directly related to the number of Covid-19 cases in the country.
2. The IMA also noted that the per-bed Biomedical waste generation was 250 grams per day before the pandemic. But today, per-bed Biomedical waste generation is around 400 grams per day.
3. The **majority of biomedical waste generated** during the pandemic is **related to Covid-19 treatment**. Such as personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves, face masks, head cover, plastic coverall, hazmat suit, syringes, and other medical equipment used by both healthcare providers and patients.
4. According to scientists, these biomedical wastes will take **thousands of years to biodegrade**. During the process, they will also **release tonnes of microplastics** into our environment.
5. To tackle this menace the CPCB even launched a [COVID19BWM App](#) to track biomedical waste.

What is biomedical waste?

In simple terms, it means any **waste generated during diagnosis, treatment, or immunization** of human beings or animals or in research activities. Management of biomedical waste is an integral part of infection control and hygiene programs. Without proper treatment, these medical wastes can create an adverse impact on the environment and public health.

Only about 10% – 25% of BMW is hazardous, and the remaining 75%–95% is non-hazardous. So, the segregation of biomedical waste is the key to its management.

Biomedical waste management rules in India

In July 1998 the government of India notified the biomedical waste management rules. There was modification of rules in 2000, 2003, and 2011. But the 2011 medical waste management rules remained as a draft due to a lack of consensus on categorization and standards.

After the consensus and standardization, the Indian government released Biomedical Waste Management rules in 2016. The salient features of this rule are,

1. **Expansion of the ambit:** The scope of the rules have been expanded to include various health camps such as vaccination camps, blood donation camps, and surgical camps
2. **Role of State governments:** The **State Government has to provide land for setting up a common biomedical waste treatment and disposal facility (CBMWTF)**. Apart from that, the State government will also have to set up a district-level committee (This committee shall submit its report to the State Pollution Control Board every 6 months).
3. **Segregation:** Biomedical waste has been classified into 4 categories instead of the earlier 10 categories. This is to improve the segregation of waste at the source.
 - o **Yellow** – This includes post-operated body parts, caps, masks, pathological wastes, bedding, placenta, plaster of Paris, etc
 - o **Red** – This includes syringe, IV Sets, catheters, gloves, urine bags, blood bags, dialysis kits, etc
 - o **White** – This category contains waste sharps including needles, syringes, etc.
 - o **Blue** – This category contains glassware and metallic body implants
4. **Role of health care facilities:** The health care facilities have a larger role in medical waste management. Such as,
 - o Compulsory pretreatment of the laboratory, microbiological waste, and blood bags before disposal
 - o Phasing out chlorinated plastic bags, gloves, blood bags, etc
 - o Maintaining a registry of biomedical wastes generated in their facility and updating them daily.

Biomedical waste management practice in India

1. The management of **Biomedical wastes begins at the bedside of the patient**. The hospitals categorize, segregate, pre-treat, and dispose of the medical waste in different containers.
2. As per the 2016 rules, these wastes have to be treated and disposed of by Common Bio-medical Waste Treatment and Disposal Facility (CBWTF).
3. In case, there is no CBWTF within the reach of a healthcare facility, then such healthcare facility should install a captive treatment and disposal facility. According to the government data, India had 200 authorized CBWTFs in 28 States in 2020 for the environmentally safe disposal of biomedical waste. The remaining states do not have such facilities. As per official government data for 2018, India generated 608 tonnes per day of Bio-medical Waste. Of that, 528 tonnes of waste was treated and disposed of properly. So, every day there are few tonnes of biomedical waste that went untreated. The impact of Covid-19 also affects the waste handling capacity of CBWTF and captive treatment centers.

Effects of biomedical waste in India

Pollution and health hazards are the two important impacts of medical wastes.

Pollution due to biomedical waste

1. **Land Pollution:** If not treated and dumped into landfills then there is a high chance for heavy metals like cadmium, lead, mercury, etc. get released. Further, there is a chance these metals get absorbed by plants and can then enter the food chain also.

2. **Air Pollution:** Pathogens present in the waste can enter and remain in the air for a long period in the form of spores or pathogens. As the Covid-19 spread through the air, improper treating/not treating it might lead to a new wave of Covid-19.
3. **Radioactive pollution:** Hospitals are increasingly using radioactive isotopes for diagnostic and therapeutic applications. The main radioisotopes used in hospitals are technetium-99m (Tc-99m), Iodine-131(I-131), etc. This radioactive material can come from research laboratories, ICUs in liquid form. These have carcinogenic properties.

Health hazards due to biomedical waste

1. **Spread of infectious diseases:** According to the WHO study, improper waste management is one of the major causes of an increase in infectious diseases globally. This is why the Covid-19 pandemic wastes require proper treatment.
2. **Operational health hazards:** Improper handling of biomedical waste might lead to Injuries from sharps and exposure to harmful radioactive wastes. This will create issues for nurses, emergency medical personnel, sanitary workers.
3. **Increase antimicrobial resistance (AMR):** The biomedical wastes aggravate the problem of AMR. Ever since the pandemic, the use of biocides (sanitizers, disinfectants, and antibiotics) increased manifold. If there is no proper treatment of biocides then the AMR will increase rapidly.

Suggestions to improve biomedical waste management

1. **Improving the sustainability of the health care sector:** The government has to move beyond monitoring and enforcement. Instead, the government has to invest along with the health service providers to scale up the proper treatment of biomedical waste.
2. **Equipping Municipalities and Panchayats:** The government has to provide training to ground-level workers to segregate biomedical wastes. Further, the government can even allot sufficient funds through central funding from National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).
3. **Stringent actions against defaulters:** The ill-operated health care facilities and CBWTFs have to be strictly punished. The government can even initiate the **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for producers of biomedical equipment**.
4. **Trigger Innovation:** The government can incentivise start-ups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that offer solutions for waste segregation and treatment.
5. **Awareness campaigns for waste segregation in households:** Due to home quarantine and home treatment many individuals do not use yellow and red color bags for segregating their medical wastes. So, during the supply of medicine, the health officials have to create awareness about waste segregation. They should also provide garbage bags (Red and Yellow) along with their medicines.

Conclusion

With the [opening-up of vaccination](#) for all above 18 years, the volume of infectious waste generated from the vaccination clinics will increase manifold. So, the government has to ensure proper awareness regarding waste segregation, and creation of proper facilities to treat the medical waste in India.

Issue of fertilizer subsidy in India – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The subsidy allows an individual to buy a product or use a service at a lower price than its market cost. The government in India has been providing a host of price subsidies on kerosene, cooking gas, water, electricity, fertilizer, etc. in order to support the vulnerable sections.

The farmers have been getting the benefits of fertilizer subsidies since the era of the Green revolution. It has become a core component of providing input support to the agricultural sector.

Recently, the government has announced an increase of 140% in the subsidy amount of DAP (Diammonium phosphate) fertilizer. It is expected to provide a sigh of relief to the farming community who is already facing severe pandemic stress. They have lost their loved ones and are battling the double jeopardy of rising healthcare bills and reduced urban remittances. This move would bring temporary relief to the sector but a permanent solution warrants long term reforms to make the agriculture sector more lucrative.

Current Scenario

- Recently, a committee headed by PM took a decision to increase the subsidy on DAP (Diammonium phosphate) fertilizer. The subsidy was increased by 140% from Rs 500 per bag to Rs 1200 per bag.
- Till last year, the actual price of DAP was 1700. The farmers were getting one bag for 1200 and a 500 rupee subsidy was given to companies.
 - However, now the actual price of DAP is 2400 as international prices of phosphoric acid, ammonia etc. used in DAP have increased. Therefore in order to prevent companies from selling DAP at 1900 rupees, the government enhanced the subsidy.
- The Department of Fertilizers has further notified a higher per-kg NBS (Nutrient Based Subsidy) rate for P. It increased to Rs 45.323/kg while the earlier rate was Rs 14.888/kg.

About DAP

- It is the second most commonly used fertilizer in India. It has sales of 119.13 lakh tonnes (lt) in 2020-21 next only to the urea. Furthermore, it is applied just before or at the time of sowing by the farmers.
- The fertilizer is high in phosphorus (P) that stimulates root establishment and development. It contains 46% P and 18% nitrogen (N). Without DAP, the plants cannot grow to their normal size or will take too long to mature.
- It is similar to urea and muriate of potash (MOP), which again have very high N and potassium (K) content of 46% and 60%, respectively.

Fertilizer Subsidy in India

- Under the subsidy regime, farmers buy fertilizers at Maximum Retail Prices (MRP). However, this MRP is below the normal supply-and-demand-based market rates or what it costs to produce/import them.
- While, the MRP for urea is controlled/fixed by the government, it is decontrolled for other fertilizers including DAP, MOP, etc.
 - The maximum retail price (MRP) of urea is currently fixed at Rs 5,378 per tonne or Rs 242 for a 45-kg bag. Since companies have to sell at this controlled rate (fixed MRP), the subsidy is variable. It means subsidy

depends upon the market price or costing of Urea. Government has to pay the difference between controlled price and market price.

- In other fertilizers, the government only gives a fixed per-tonne subsidy. This means the subsidy is fixed, while the MRPs are variable. Thus, MRP of **Decontrolled fertilizers is way above urea** MRP and attract lower subsidy. For some of the non-urea fertilizers, government launched nutrient-based subsidy or NBS scheme.

Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) regime for Non-Urea fertilizers

- Under this, a fixed amount of subsidy is calculated for each fertilizer **based on its nutrient composition**. The government decides the rates for nutrients like Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), Potassium (K), Sulphur (S), etc. which then are used for calculating a flat per ton rate.
- It means subsidy will be different for the fertilisers having different proportions of NPK. It means one tonne of DAP which contains 460 kg of P and 180 kg of N will get more subsidy compared to 10:26:26' NPK fertiliser due to the difference in nutrient compositions.
- It allows the manufacturers, marketers, and importers to fix the MRP of the Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) fertilizers at reasonable levels.
- The domestic and international cost of P&K fertilizers is considered along with the country's inventory levels and the currency exchange rate in order to decide the MRP.

Need for increasing the fertilizer subsidy on DAP

- **Cushioning the farmers from Price rise:** The rise in subsidy would protect the farmers from the price rise. The fertilizer companies have enhanced the MRP of DAP from 1200 to 1900 as international prices of phosphoric acid, ammonia, etc. raw materials have increased.
 - They would still pay 1200 rupees per bag despite the fact that the international prices of phosphoric acid, ammonia, etc. used in DAP have gone up by 60% to 70%.
- **Boost Production:** DAP is a crucial fertilizer for growing cotton and soybean in the western and northern regions of India. With sufficient subsidy, the farmers would be able to grow more produce in the Kharif season.
- **Tackle the Covid impact:** The farmers are undergoing severe stress due to the challenges posed to them by the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes loss of urban remittances, the rising cost of healthcare, and death of bread earners in the family. The increased subsidy would provide some relief to them.
- **Political Considerations:** Some experts are also viewing the rise in subsidies as a move to prevent the resurgence of the farmer's protest amid the second wave of Covid 19.

Steps to taken by Government to prevent fertilizer overuse

- Compulsory neem-coating of all urea from December 2015.
- Making fertilizer subsidy payment to companies conditional upon actual sales to farmers being registered on point-of-sale machines from 2018. Under this, a valid sale requires a biometric authentication aadhar card or kisan credit card number.
- There is an upcoming plan to cap the total number of subsidised fertilizer bags that any person can purchase during an entire cropping season.

Issues associated with fertilizer subsidy

- **No Denial Policy:** Currently anybody can purchase any quantity of fertilizers through the PoS machines. There is a limit of 100 bags per transaction, but no limit is placed on the number of transactions. This enhances the diversion of fertilizers towards unintended beneficiaries.
 - For instance, urea's super subsidized and multiple usage nature makes it highly prone to diversion.
 - It can be used as a binder by plywood/particle board makers, cheap protein source by animal feed manufacturers or adulterant by milk vendors. Further, it is also smuggled to Nepal and Bangladesh.
- **Environment Degradation:** The subsidies have enabled the over utilisation of fertilizers on agricultural lands. This is especially true for the super cheap urea which has witnessed a minor price rise since the last decade.
 - The bulk of urea applied to the soil is lost as NH₃ (Ammonia) and Nitrogen Oxide due to poor Nitrogen use efficiency of Indian Soils. This leads to contamination of groundwater, soil, land, etc.
- **Economic Costs:** The Central Government spends about Rs **80,000 crore on subsidies** for chemical fertilizers every year. With the increase in subsidy in DAP, the government will spend an additional Rs 14,775 crore as subsidy in Kharif season.
- **Health impacts:** Over use of fertilizers also pollutes groundwater. Infants who drink water with high levels of nitrate (or eat foods made with nitrate-contaminated water) may develop the **blue baby syndrome**.
 - It refers to a number of conditions that affect oxygen transportation in the blood, resulting in the blueness of the skin in babies.

Suggestions

1. **First**, the government should consider alternative ways for helping the farmers like the use of Direct Benefit transfer instead of subsidies. This would curb its diversion for non-agricultural use and reduce the number of fraudulent beneficiaries.
 - Until then, there should be a cap on the total number of subsidised fertilizer bags that any person can buy during an entire kharif or rabi cropping season.
2. **Second**, urea should be included under the NBS scheme in order to reduce the fiscal burden of fertilizer subsidy on the government. This was recommended by the Sharad Pawar Committee in 2012.
3. **Third**, the focus should now be placed on discouraging the use of chemical fertilizers and encouraging the adoption of organic fertilizers like vermicompost, seaweed extracts, etc. This would be in line with sustainable development and prevent land degradation.
4. **Fourth**, in the long run, the government needs to augment the agricultural income of farmers so that they voluntarily give up their subsidies in the future. This would happen with better implementation of schemes like E-NAM, SAMPADA, PM Fasal Bima Yojana, etc.

Conclusion

The subsidies are like a dole to the farmer, it is saving his body but destroying its spirit. The ultimate solution is to make agriculture more lucrative and remunerative which would gradually lead to the withdrawal of subsidies and relieve the government of their fiscal burden.

Need of Indigenous Semiconductor Manufacturing Facilities in India – Explained Pointwise

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns are impacting the production of semiconductor chips across the globe. It is creating shortages for the buyers, such as the car manufacturers and consumer electronics manufacturers in India. This in turn has forced manufacturers to reduce their production levels thereby their profit potential is decreasing.

The Chip Famine presents an opportunity for India to develop the capacity to manufacture indigenous semiconductor chips. It would reduce its import dependence and help meet the rising demand of the future.

Semiconductors are truly a modern marvel, a feat of human ingenuity and engineering unmatched by any other industry. Therefore, robust reforms must be undertaken to establish the domestic manufacturing capacity of semiconductors in India.

About Semiconductors:

- A semiconductor is a material that allows electrical conductivity between a conductor and an insulator.
 - Conductors are the materials or substances which allow electricity to flow through them. They conduct electricity because they allow electrons to flow easily inside them from atom to atom. Conducting materials include gold, silver, mercury, seawater, etc.
 - An insulator is a material that does not conduct electrical current. Insulating materials include paper, plastic, rubber, glass, and air.
- They have less resistivity than insulators and more than conductors. The resistance of the semiconductor decreases with an increase in temperature and vice versa.
- Semiconductors are made from pure elements like **silicon or germanium, or compounds such as gallium arsenide**. Sometimes their conductivity is changed through doping.
 - It is a process of adding small amounts of impurities to these pure elements, causing large changes in the conductivity of the material.

Significance of semiconductor chips:

- Semiconductors are **the building blocks of today's technology**. For instance, They control
 - the computers we use to conduct business,
 - the phones and mobile devices we use to communicate,
 - the cars and planes that get us from place to place,
 - the machines that diagnose and treat illnesses,
 - the military systems that protect us, and
 - the electronic gadgets we use to listen to music, watch movies and play games
- Semiconductors **make the devices more compact, less expensive, and more powerful**.
 - For instance, mobile phones weighed about 2 lbs, cost around \$4,000, and held a charge for only about 30 minutes of talk time during their initial phase. However today an individual can buy a smartphone for 5000 rupees that would give a 1-day charge.

- Semiconductors will **continue to enable the world's greatest breakthroughs**. From aerospace and consumer electronics to energy and medicine, entire industries will be transformed.

India's sources for Semiconductors requirements:

- Firstly, Semiconductor manufacturing comprises the front-end **fab manufacturing** and the **back-end assembly**, including packaging and testing. There are only a handful of companies globally that do front-end manufacturing at scale.
- Secondly, Globally, this entire value chain has seeped in the interdependence between a handful of countries like the USA, Taiwan, Japan, China, and some European nations.
- Thirdly, India has done well in design and verification for the semiconductor industry. Most of the global semiconductor companies having an R&D footprint in India.
- Fourthly, However, 100% of our chips, memory, and display are imported into the country. In 2020, India spent \$15bn on electronic imports, with 37% coming from China.
- Fifthly, although India has two fabs — SITAR, a unit of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in Bengaluru, and a semiconductor laboratory in Chandigarh. These build silicon chips for strategic purposes like defense and space and not for commercial use.

Why does India need indigenous capacity for manufacturing semiconductor chips?

1. **Tackle supply shocks:** The pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns impacted the supply of chips to India. Automobile manufacturers like Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata group were compelled to reduce their production due to the shortage.
2. **Meet the rising demand:** Experts estimate that around 50 crore people will join the internet in the next decade thereby demanding more phones and laptops.
 - a. Similarly, the post-pandemic world is showing a greater inclination towards work from home culture. This warrants an enhanced demand for servers, internet connectivity, and cloud usage.
3. **Employment Creation:** Indigenous manufacturing of chips will build its smartphone assembly industry and strengthen its electronics supply chain. This will create numerous employment opportunities for the Indian youth.
4. **Revenue boost:** Indigenous capacity would attract local taxes and boost the export potential. Further, India would be required to import fewer semiconductor chips which would decrease the import bill.
5. **Geopolitical Benefits:** Countries having a sufficient supply of chips would be in a better position to mold the future course of geopolitics, driven by data and the digital revolution. Further self-sufficiency will decrease reliance on Chinese chip imports especially during hard times like the recent Galwan Valley border clash.
6. **Enhanced Security:** Chips made locally will be designated as “trusted sources” and can be used in products ranging from CCTV cameras to 5G equipment. This would improve the national cybersecurity profile.

Initiatives taken to promote indigenous Semiconductor capacity

- **National Policy on Electronics 2019:** It envisions positioning India as a global hub for Electronics System Design and Manufacturing (ESDM) sector. It aims to encourage the development of core components (including chipsets) and create an enabling environment for the industry to compete globally.
- **Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS):** The government will provide a financial incentive of 25% on capital expenditure for a list of products that constitute the supply chain of electronic products. This includes products such as electronic components, semiconductors, and specialized sub-assemblies.
 - India would be offering **more than \$1 billion** in cash to each semiconductor company that sets up manufacturing units in the country.
- **Modified Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0) Scheme:** Under this, the government will provide support for the setting up of Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMCs) and Common Facility Centres (CFCs).
- **Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI):** Under this, the government will provide an incentive of 4% to 6% on goods manufactured in India and covered under target segments to eligible companies for a period of five years.
- **Foreign Direct Investment:** The Government of India has allowed 100 percent (FDI) under the automatic route in the Electronics Systems Design & Manufacturing sector.

What are the challenges in front of India?

- **Firstly, High Cost of establishment:** As per a government estimate, it would cost roughly \$5-\$7 billion to set up a chip fabrication unit in India.
- **Secondly, Bureaucratic inefficiencies:** The process of establishing an indigenous semiconductor facility requires clearances and approvals from multiple government departments. Further, there exists a considerable degree of bureaucratic delays at each stage that discourages the establishment of manufacturing units.
- **Thirdly, Unstable power supply:** The smooth production of semiconductors requires the availability of an uninterrupted 24*7 power supply. However, this requirement is not fulfilled by many regions in the country. This restricts production to very few locations.
- **Fourthly, Technological Constraint:** The indigenous manufacturing of semiconductors requires the use of high-end technologies. These technologies are licensed from patent holders at a very high price.
- **Fifthly, Structural Flaws:** FDI in electronics is less than 1% of the total FDI inflow because of the dearth of skilled labor, delays in land acquisition, and the uncertain tax regime.

Suggestions

- The government should provide **adequate funding** to augment the research and development potential of technical institutes.
 - For instance, IIT Madras developed a microprocessor named 'Moushik' with funding support from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
 - The microprocessor is an integrated circuit (IC) that contains a few million transistors (semiconductor-based electronic devices) fused on a semiconductor chip.

- The proposed **Sovereign Patent Fund (SPF)** under National Policy on electronics should be established expeditiously. It is a wholly or partly Government-backed entity that aims to bolster domestic businesses through the acquisition and licensing of patented technology.
- Apart from this, the manufacturers need to be given **an assurance of minimum domestic procurement** by the government and the private sector. The focus should be on manufacturing **economical and technically viable options** like 28nm chips.
- The government should also **support businesses in the acquisition of semiconductor manufacturing units in other countries**. This is easier than setting up a domestic facility and can be done swiftly for ensuring a continuous supply of chips.

Conclusion

The 21st century will be an era of Digital revolution signifying an increased use of mobile phones and computer devices. This enhanced usage can be met only with a robust availability of semiconductor chips that sustains their functioning. Therefore India needs to focus on the indigenous development of semiconductors in order to realize its digital potential and emerge as a strong power in the present era.

Challenges in Vaccine Procurement in India – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

According to the data from the Ministry of Health and Family welfare, so far, India has vaccinated only 417 million people (less than 3.1% of the population has received both doses). The population of India is 1.3 billion. If vaccines require two doses then India needs more than 2 billion doses across the nation. But neither the Covaxin nor the Covishield has that much production capacity to meet the world's largest Covid-19 vaccination drive in India. So, India needs to do large-scale vaccine procurement to meet India's ambition towards [universal vaccination against Covid-19](#).

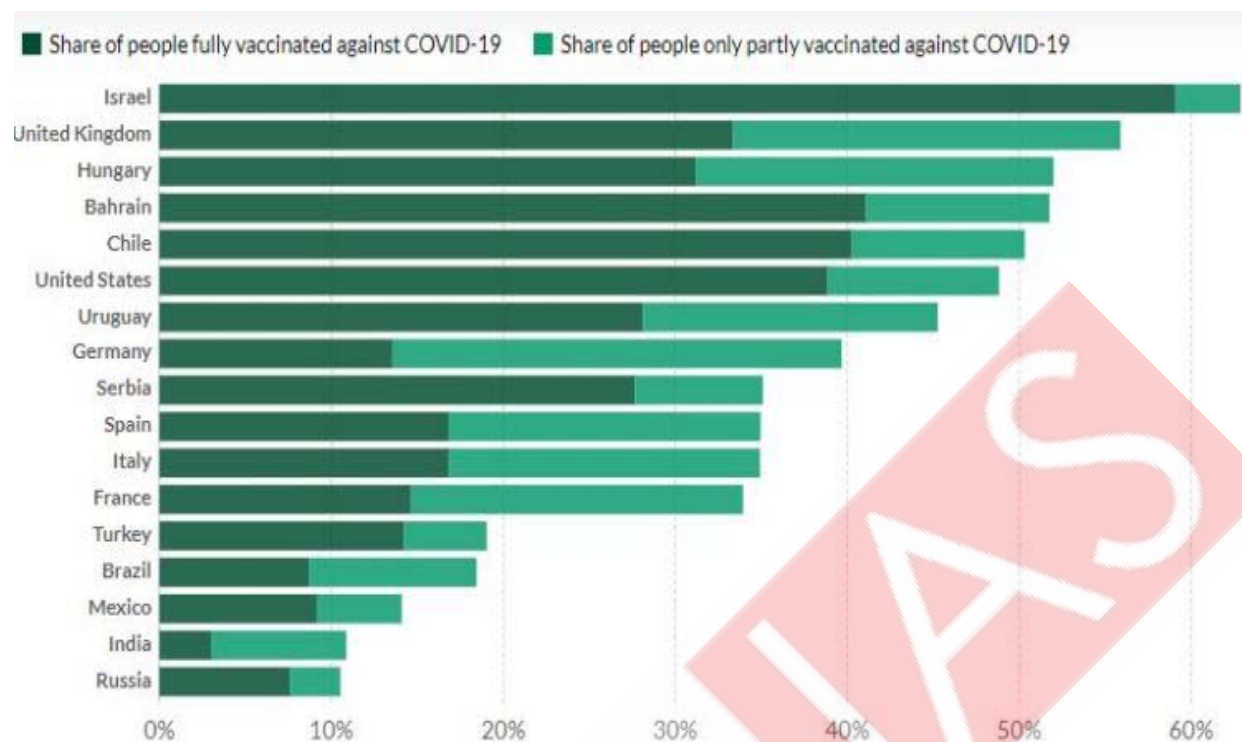
Recently India started procuring Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine in India. Apart from that, 10 states (Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, and Delhi) decided to procure vaccines globally as there is a shortage of vaccines in India. In this article, we will explain various issues associated with vaccine procurement in India.

Present status of vaccine manufacturing in India

1. Both Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech are providing vaccines to India in fight against Covid-19.
2. The world's largest vaccine maker, Serum Institute of India, initially promised to supply 100 million doses of vaccines a month. But in reality, it only provided between 50 million to 60 million doses.
3. On the other hand, Bharat Biotech has a planned production capacity of 12.5 million a month. But their current production is somewhere between 1-5 million.
4. So, India's monthly Covid-19 vaccine manufacturing capacity is about 60-65 million doses only.
5. The target of vaccination will require more than 1.5 billion doses. As [Covaxin and Covishield](#) require two doses. But the present production capacity cannot meet that amount in a short time.
6. Moreover, according to the Ministry of External Affairs website, India almost exported vaccines to 95 countries in the world. As of May 11, India exported 663.698 lakh vaccine doses to foreign countries. Out of this, 16% was sent as aid, 54% as commercial supplies, and 30% as part of [WHO's COVAX program](#).
7. So, technically the vaccine availability in India reduced further below the daily requirement of vaccines in India. For example, With only 20 million vaccine shots available for the entire month of May, many State governments have resorted to floating global tenders for COVID-19 vaccines.
8. On May 1, the first consignment of the Sputnik V vaccine – 1.5 lakh doses – arrived in India. According to the health ministry's website, the Vaccine is started administered to people recently.

Global Vaccine sources and producers

- According to **the Covid-19 vaccine market dashboard, 14 vaccines are licensed or approved** for emergency/conditional use. These 14 vaccine prices range from \$2 to \$40. So far 12.2 billion doses have been administered. The majority of them occurred in developed countries. So, to achieve a similar feat India needs to procure from global players.



Source: Our World in data

Global Vaccine manufacturers and their type of vaccines

Vaccine	Manufacturer	Type of Vaccine
Coronovac	Sinovac (China)	Purified inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine
Sputnik-V	Gamaleya Institute (Russia)	Disabled Adenovirus vaccine
Pfizer/BioNtech Comirnaty	Pfizer/BioNtech(US)	mRNA vaccine
Covishield	AstraZeneca/Oxford/SII	Disabled Adenovirus vaccine
Janssen	Johnson and Jonson(US)/Merck & Co	Disabled Adenovirus vaccine
Convidecia	Cansino Biologics(China)	Disabled Adenovirus vaccine
Moderna	Moderna Inc(USA)	mRNA vaccine

- Globally developed countries hold huge stocks of Covid-19 vaccines. For example, Rich countries with 14% of the world's population have secured 53% of the best vaccines. For example, The USA has committed stocks of 1.2 billion doses. Even though the population is around 300 million. But recently the US started to release vaccine stocks after global concerns. India can take opportunities on that and procure vaccines.
- India can negotiate with vaccine manufacturers like Moderna, Pfizer etc for procuring vaccines.

Government initiatives in vaccine procurement

- Changes in vaccination policy:** The Government of India recently announced the fourth phase of its [New Covid-19 vaccine policy](#). The policy Liberalised and Accelerated vaccine procurement. Under the new rules, the Centre will procure only 50% of vaccines produced by manufacturers. The remaining 50% can be acquired by the states directly or by private hospitals and industrial establishments at a predecided price.
 - Apart from that, The Centre allowed the imported, fully ready-to-use vaccines to be entirely utilized in the other-than-Government of India channel.
 - Thus, if a foreign pharma giant brings its vaccine to India, it will be free to directly sell the entire stock in the open market at a competitive price.
- Talks with global manufacturers:** According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India is in touch with US entities for procurement of vaccines and manufacturing them in the country to augment vaccine supply.
- Permitting the import of the Sputnik V vaccine:** The central government allowed Russia's Sputnik-V vaccine import into India.
- Raising issues in global forums:** As the [Intellectual Property Rights](#) hinder the supply of vaccines, both India and South Africa have proposed to waive off IP rights like patents, copyright, and trademarks for prevention, containment, or treatment of Covid-19. Other developing countries started to co-sponsor India and South Africa requests. The TRIPS Council also discussed this issue both formally and informally.

Challenges in Vaccine procurement

- Issues in permitting States to procure vaccines:** As the central government left the states to decide the prices from foreign pharma companies, it is leading to [various issues in procurement](#). Such as,
- Unhealthy competition among States:** States will compete among each other for the limited vaccines. This will **reduce cooperative federalism in India**.
- Non-uniform vaccine prices and Higher cost of Vaccines:** There is inexperience in States regarding international market and negotiation. Further, the States will have to procure doses at higher rates than a single national purchaser. As there is a competition of states involved. This leads to increased cost of each vaccine dose in India compares to any other part of the world. Also, the prices will essentially increase **state government expenditure**. For example, Recently Supreme Court noted, states are paying more – between 300 rupees to 400 rupees per dose – while the central government is paying 150 rupees.
- Detrimental to India's image:** As several states floating separate tenders to procure Covid-19 vaccines from abroad, This will be detrimental for India's image in the world. Also, this will **fracture India's bargaining power**.
- The difference in Covid-19 reduction rate among rich and poor states:** Richer states will be better positioned in procuring the highest number of vaccine doses from abroad. So, they can reduce the Covid-19 caseload faster. On the other hand, Poor states might suffer more from the present and future Covid-19 waves.
- Against India's Vaccination policy:** In India, the Center procures vaccines and the States administer them. This helped India to deal with public health problems such as polio, etc. The new vaccination policy is a violation of India's prior vaccination policies.

Challenges in distribution

1. **Unequal distribution of cold storage facilities among states.** Even if states procure vaccines, they cannot distribute the vaccines easily. For example, out of the 28,932 cold chain points, half are in the five southern states, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Whereas the eight states in the North and Odisha that account for over 40 percent of the country's population have only 28 percent of the cold chain points.
2. **The Issue of Vaccine wastage:** According to the RTI information, India has wasted more than 44 lakh of 10 crore doses (Till April 11). Tamil Nadu wasted over 12 percent, followed by Haryana (9.74%), Punjab (8.12%). Ideally, a vaccination center must have 10 recipients to make optimal use of a single 10-dose vial. If the person is not available then that vaccine vial becomes a waste.

Suggestions

1. **Conducting a detailed demand-supply analysis:** To conduct a calibrated expansion of the eligibility criteria India needs to conduct a detailed analysis including the vaccine manufacturers' real-time production capability, the supply chain delays, etc.
2. **Change the vaccination policy:** The Centre needs to take charge of all procurement and negotiations with all vaccine suppliers including domestic and foreign suppliers without any exception. Even the Supreme Court also raised issues in state procurement and called the central government to relook its procurement process.
3. **Work with domestic manufacturers to increase the supply:** The Centre should seek clarity from Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech regarding their weekly schedule of supplies, production capacity, etc. This will **help India to know the amount of vaccine shortage and plan India's future procurements.**
4. **Signing business deals with foreign manufacturers:** India can also sign agreements with global vaccine manufacturers like Pfizer, Moderna, etc. The government can include prior purchase agreements to strike a better and lower price in vaccine procurements.

Way forward

In conclusion, the government not only needs to focus on vaccine procurement. But also has to focus on monitoring the **progress of domestic and foreign vaccines, tracking adverse events** of vaccination, reviewing the **performance of vaccine** and **sharing it with people to ensure public confidence.** Further, it will also make India a step closer to Universal vaccination.

Types of Vaccines:

mRNA vaccines: It is a new type of vaccine to protect against infectious diseases. It does not use the conventional model to produce an immune response. mRNA vaccine carries the molecular instructions to make the protein in the body through a synthetic RNA of the virus. The host body uses this to produce the viral protein that is recognized and thereby making the body mount an immune response against the disease.

Adeno Virus vaccines: In this type, a modified version of adenovirus is used. The virus can enter human cells but not replicate inside. A gene for the coronavirus vaccine was added into the adenovirus DNA, allowing the vaccine to target the spike proteins that SARS-CoV-2 uses to enter human cells.

Inactivated SARS-CoV-2 vaccine: In this type, an inactivated live virus is used to create an immune response against the disease.

India's Act East Policy : Issues and Challenges – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, the majority of countries made changes to their economic and strategic policies. It was to align themselves to the changing geopolitical realities. India also realized the importance of Southeast Asia in 1992, so it launched a 'Look East Policy'. The policy aimed at better integration with the region and other US allies after the end of the Cold War era. This policy was upgraded to '[Act East Policy](#)' in 2014 for cultivating extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia.

The policy has helped in encouraging cooperation on various projects like kaladan multi-modal project, Trilateral Highway, etc. However, there are many factors that are acting as hurdles in smooth cooperation.

The fragile nature of the relationship was recently highlighted by an unpleasant tweet by the Delhi CM over the threat of a new Covid-19 variant from Singapore. The tweet received criticism from both the Singapore Government and the Civil Society. The situation now presents an opportunity for India to introspect on the concerning factors that act against the success of Act East policy and take some remedial steps.

About India's Act East Policy

- It was launched at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit in 2014 held in Myanmar. The policy is **based on 4 C's** – Culture, Commerce, Connectivity, and Capacity Building.
- It is an effort of India to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia and further strengthen its relationship with Indo-Pacific.
- India's focus under Act East remains on
 - Enhancing economic relations with ASEAN
 - Ensuring greater infrastructural connectivity and foreign direct investment
 - Augmenting regional development in northeastern India
- It is the successor of 1992 Look East Policy.

Comparing Look East with Act East

- **First, the scope of Act East policy is wider.** It focuses on boosting economic co-operation, building infrastructure for greater connectivity, improving strategic & security ties.
 - On the other hand, **Look East** mainly focused on boosting economic cooperation.
- **Second, the Act East policy was launched to tackle the changing Geo-political scenario.** The aim was curtailing Chinese dominance in the South China Sea and its rising influence over the Indian Ocean Region.
 - However, **Look East** mainly aimed to boost trade and investment relations with Southeast Asian countries. The fall of the USSR has induced India to look for alternate options for sustaining its economic growth.
- **Third, heavy focus is being given to the development of the North East region** under Act East policy. This factor was neglected in India's plans of forging deeper ties with East Asia under the Look East policy.
- **Fourth, Act East Policy focuses more on historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious ties** through more people-to-people exchanges. This factor was also absent under the Look East policy.

Progress made under the Act East Policy

1. **Engagement with ASEAN:** ASEAN-India engagement has become deeper and has scaled new heights. **India is now the 4th largest trading partner of ASEAN.** Southeast Asian countries favor India's increased involvement to counter China's expansionist policies in the region. India has allocated \$1 billion for promoting connectivity at the India-ASEAN Summit.
2. **Cooperation on Regional Initiatives:** India is steering a number of sub-regional programmes and projects such as the BBIN corridor, Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan multimodal project etc.
3. **North-East development:** The Act East Policy focuses mainly on the Northeast region. The Government of Japan has decided to invest around Rs 13,000 Crore in several ongoing, as well as new projects in different states of India's North-Eastern region.
 - India-Japan Act East Forum was established in 2017. It will identify specific projects for economic modernization of India's North-East region
4. **Security Engagement:** Defence cooperation has increased with East Asian countries. In 2014, India and Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that opened up a line of credit for Vietnam to purchase defense equipment from India.
 - Since 2015, India has carried out joint maritime-law enforcement patrols and military exercises with ASEAN countries.
 - Similarly, the first summit of QUAD grouping took place in 2021.
5. **Far East involvement:** Recently, India has reached out to Far East economies especially Russia. India has announced to extend a \$1 billion line of credit towards the development of the Russian Far East. This is important as it is an energy-rich region and would help India's economic growth.

Factors inhibiting the success of Act East Policy

1. **First**, there has been a **growth in China's influence combined with growing China-India tensions.** Both China's direct influence and that of ethnic Chinese in the region are on the rise. Further the civil society is impressed with the way China has handled the pandemic and provided aid to the region.
 - On the other hand, Sino-India relations are undergoing severe stress as seen in the 2020 Galwan valley clash.
2. **Second**, there is **disappointment in the region with India's economic policies.** Important economic agreements signed between India and East Asian countries are rather scarce. So far, India has only signed a memorandum of cooperation on oceans and fisheries with South Korea.
 - Further India was the only country to withdraw from the recent Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) deal.
3. **Third**, there is **rising concern in the region with India's approach towards its minorities**, especially Muslims and Christians.
 - Growing concern about Hindu majoritarianism in India has impacted civil society attitudes in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore.
 - India deployed the soft power of "Buddhist diplomacy" but that too has not gained much traction as inter-religious tensions in the region grow.

Suggestions to improve the relations

1. The government should **complete the tasks promised in the Delhi Declaration 2018**. This includes:
 - the digital connectivity projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam
 - the Trilateral Highway (TH) and
 - the Trilateral Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA)
2. There must be empowering of states by the government to play a better role under the Act East Policy. For instance, **a Northeast branch of NITI Aayog** can be set up to bridge the gaps between the Centre and States while implementing the Act East.
3. The government should also focus on regional groupings like **BIMSTEC** which is a natural connector of South and Southeast Asia.
 - Countries must enhance the negotiation process to conclude BIMSTEC MVA, BIMSTEC coastal shipping agreement, and BIMSTEC TFA (Trade Facilitation Agreement).
4. The development cooperation projects for the Act East should be put in fast-track by **avoiding cumbersome documentation and bureaucratic procedures**. For this, EXIM Bank of India should open its branches in all South, Southeast and East Asian countries.
 - Further, coordination between Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of External Affairs needs to be enhanced for timely implementation.
5. The government should **reap the low-hanging fruits** in India- Southeast Asia countries.
 - For instance, international flights can be started from Imphal to other countries for boosting medical tourism. Imphal's Shija Hospital has already become a favourite destination of Myanmar people for health check-ups.
6. The country should **expand the outreach of Act East policy** by adding neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. This would enable better development of India's Eastern and Northeastern states.

Conclusion

India must take a fresh look at its Act East policy and the impacts of unsatisfactory economic performance and sectarian politics at home. The country must revamp its policy in such a way that its soft power enhances in the Southeast Asian region. This would produce multiplier effects in achieving the intended objectives of Act East policy.

Analysis of GST regime in India – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The GST Council was mandated to meet at least once every quarter, but due to the pandemic, the council had not met for two quarters. Recently the government announced the 43rd meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council on May 28. There are many issues in front of the council such as controlling petrol price rise, reducing GST levies on critical COVID-19 supplies and vaccines, etc. But apart from these, there are many fundamental issues surrounding the GST regime in India.

States are dependent on GST collections for nearly half of their tax revenues. 14 states requested help from the Center to manage their finances during the pandemic. On the other hand, the central government imposed various cesses such as cess on exports, health, and education, etc. As the Center does not want to share them with the States. In this article, we will analyse the [impact of GST regime in India](#).

A brief about GST Regime in India

- Goods and Services Tax(GST) is a **comprehensive indirect tax** on the manufacture, sale, and consumption of goods and services throughout India. It replaced the existing taxes levied by the central and state governments. It is a single indirect tax for the whole nation, which made India one unified common market.
- Likewise, it is a destination-based tax applied on goods and services at the place where final/actual consumption happens.
- GST is applied to all goods **other than crude petroleum, motor spirit, diesel, aviation turbine fuel, and natural gas and alcohol for human consumption**.
- There are **four slabs for taxes** for both goods and services- 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%.
- Although GST aimed at levying a uniform tax rate on all products and services, four different tax slabs were introduced because daily necessities could not be subject to the same rate as luxury items.

About GST Council

- [GST Council](#) is the most important part of India's GST regime. The council is responsible for recommending rates of tax, period of levy of additional tax, principles of supply, the threshold for exemption, floor level and bands of taxation rate, special provisions to certain states, etc.
- Article 279A of the constitution enables the **formation of the GST Council by the President to administer & govern GST**. The Union Finance Minister of India is a Chairman of the GST Council. Ministers nominated by the state governments are members of the GST Council.
- The council is devised in such a way that the center has 1/3rd voting power and the states have 2/3rd.
- The decisions are taken by the 3/4th majority.
- A **mechanism for resolving disputes** arising out of its recommendations also decided by the **Council itself**.

Achievements of GST regime in India

1. **Expansion of Tax Net:** The number of registered taxpayers at the time when the GST was rolled out was Rs 65 lakhs. But as of March 2020, there were 1.23 crore active GST registrations. This indicates a significant increase in tax base and a change in taxpayers' compliance behavior. Apart from that, the GST regime also brought a **cash-driven informal economy into the tax net**.
2. **Revenue collections:** In 2018-19, the average monthly collection was Rs 97,100 crore with collections breaching Rs 1 lakh crore regularly. In 2019-20, it reached INR 12.2 lakh crore.
3. **Introduction of e-way bill system:** Apart from few initial technical glitches, the e-way bill system has been largely streamlined. The **total number of e-way bills** (inter-state as well as intra-state) generated during Financial Year(FY) 20 were **approximately 63 Crore**. This is **13% growth when compared to FY-19**(Approx 56 Crore).
4. **Rate rationalisation:** In 2017, **nearly 19 percent** of items were under the 28 percent GST rate. But currently **only 3 percent** of the items subject to the 28 percent GST rate.
5. **Legislative amendments and clarifications:** The GST law has undergone significant changes since its inception on 1 July 2017. Within 3 years, there were almost 700 notifications, 145 circulars, and over 30 orders issued by GST Council. These aimed to address taxpayers' demand and to carry out procedural simplifications and curb tax evasion.
6. **Center-State Relations:** Since most decisions in the GST council have been unanimous this shows a better **Co-operative Federalism** in India.
7. **Reduced Interface With Tax Officials:** Within a year about 12 crore returns have been filed, and 380 crore invoices have been processed by the **GST Network** (the IT backbone for taxpayers to pay tax, file returns, and claim refunds). This reduced the user's interface with a tax official.
8. **Reduction in turnaround time:** The turnaround time for transportation of goods has come down with the dismantling of barriers and check posts on state borders. This is gradually leading to the **emergence of a truly national market**.

Issues in GST Regime in India

The **15th Finance Commission report** formally acknowledges that the GST regime in India is an **economic failure** that did not deliver on its early promises.

1. **Multiple Tax Rates:** Unlike many other economies which have implemented this tax regime, India has multiple tax rates. This hampers the progress of a single indirect tax rate for all the goods and services in the country.
2. **New Cesses crop up:** While GST scrapped multiplicity of taxes and cesses, a new levy in the form of compensation cess was introduced for luxury and sin goods. This was later expanded to include automobiles.
3. **Economy Outside GST purview:** Nearly half the economy remains outside GST. E.g. **petroleum, real estate, electricity duties** remain outside GST purview.
4. **The complexity of tax filings:** The GST legislation requires the **filing of the GST annual returns** by specified categories of taxpayers along with a GST audit. But, filing annual returns is a complex and confusing one for the taxpayers. Apart from that, the annual filing also includes many details that are waived in the monthly and quarterly filings.
5. **Higher tax rates:** Though rates are rationalised, there is **still 50 percent of items are under the 18 percent bracket**. Apart from that, there are certain essential

items to tackle the pandemic that was also taxed higher. For example, the **12% tax on [oxygen concentrators](#), 5% on vaccines**, and on relief supplies from abroad

Erosion of 'trust' and 'trustworthiness'

Recently the [GST Compensation issue](#) between the Center and the State led to decreasing trust in the center by some states. Apart from that, the other issues eroding the Co-operative federalism are,

- **End of revenue guarantee:** During the enactment of GST, the Center promised compensation for loss of revenue faced by states. This revenue guarantee ends in July 2022. Citing the pandemic, some states are demanding more compensation time
- **Loss of fiscal autonomy of states:** States surrendered the majority of their indirect taxation powers for the implementation of GST. At present, States have no taxation powers over them. But the GST revenues are uncertain, and the States also do not witness on the ground.
- **The issue of Pandemic:** The second wave of Covid-19 infections put greater onus on the States. Such as mobility restrictions, [vaccination sequencing](#), and even [procurement of Vaccines](#). With less tax revenue on hand, the States cannot meet all the needs to tackle the pandemic.

Suggestions to improve the GST regime in India

1. **Expansion Of Tax Base:** There are many goods that are still outside the GST net and hamper the seamless flow of input tax credit. Key items outside its ambit are **electricity, alcohol, petroleum goods, and real estate**. Among fuels, it may be possible to bring natural gas and aviation fuel within GST. Also, the government in the upcoming meeting can **reduce the GST on essential items such as oxygen concentrators, vaccines, etc to overcome the pandemic**.
2. **Infusing tax predictability:** The GST Council can adjust the rates only once a year. Further, the Center **shouldn't bypass GST by introducing any Cess**. The Center can also **rationalise the present Cess ecosystem** in India to a bare minimum. This will ensure **tax predictability to states and enhance the ease of doing business**.
3. **More accommodative approach from the Center:** To prevent an irretrievable breakdown during the pandemic the Center has to be more accommodative to State's needs. Such as, allocating State's share properly, procuring vaccines from abroad, etc. This will further enhance State's reliability on GST.

Conclusion

GST is a positive step towards shifting the Indian economy from the informal to the formal one. But, the Center and States have to understand the limitations associated with Indirect Taxes and move towards the inclusion of people into the Direct tax bracket. But, to revive GST Regime back on track India needs some radical steps such as an extension of revenue guarantee to States, restricting cesses, above all respecting the need of State governments fiscal problems.

New IT Rules for Social Media and its challenges – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The [Information Technology \(Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code\) Rules, 2021](#) came into force in India. The new IT rules have been framed to address the Social Media, Digital Media, and OTT platforms in a specific manner. The government has released the **new IT rules, 2021** in February. The government provided 3 months' time for Social media platforms to adhere to the rules. That 3-month time period ended on 25th May and the New IT Rules for Social Media came into effect from May 26th.

Though the rules mention social media platforms as an intermediary, some provisions **treat them at par with publishers of content**. Such as prohibiting unlawful content on the platform, appointing a Chief Compliance Officer, etc. This attracted large criticism from social media companies. Most of the social media giants did not comply with the rules. Further, WhatsApp even filed a case in Delhi High Court contesting the traceability provision.

New IT Rules 2021 for Social Media

1. Social media companies are **prohibited from hosting or publishing any unlawful information**. This information is “in relation to the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, friendly relations with foreign countries, etc”.
2. **If such information is hosted or published the government can take down such information within 24 hours**. The user will be **given a notice** before his/her content is taken down.
3. Traceability mechanism: This provision requires the **social media platforms to compulsorily identify the first originator of the information** in India, upon government or court order.
4. The IT rules 2021 call for social media companies to **publish a monthly compliance report**.
5. Social media platforms are classified into **two categories**
 1. **Social media intermediaries** – Platforms that have a limited user base.
 2. **Significant social media intermediaries** – These are the platforms with a large user base.
1. The **significant social media intermediaries** have to follow few additional measures like:
 - a. These platforms should **have a physical contact address** in India.
 - b. **Appointing a Chief Compliance Officer, Nodal Contact Person, and a Resident Grievance Officer in India**. All of them should be Indian Residents.
 - i. Nodal Contact Person will do 24×7 coordination with law enforcement agencies.
 - ii. The Resident Grievance Officer must acknowledge the complaint within 24 hours, and resolve it within 15 days of receipt.

Issues surrounding the New IT Rules 2021 for Social Media

1. **The issues associated with [traceability provision in rules](#)**: The rules require tracing the information back to the source. This is against some social media policies. For example, WhatsApp claiming their policy as end-to-end encrypted cannot accept new IT rules. If they accept, then their services cannot remain end-to-end encrypted.
 - o **Against Doctrine of Proportionality**: It is a principle where courts examine processes of the administration for reaching or recalling a decision. Proportionality means that the action should not be more drastic than it ought to be for obtaining the desired result.

- i. Under this doctrine, there is a question on whether the executive could achieve the goal (i.e. elimination of the threat to security and sovereignty of the nation by social media) by adopting drastic measures such as tracing the messages.
2. **Enhancing political control:** Implementation of New IT Rules will increase political control of **social media companies and posts in social media**. This is because the New IT Rules for social media **do not have legal backing**. For example, For example, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act provides powers to TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India). But the new IT rules are framed by bureaucrats there might be wider use of **discretionary censorship**.
3. **Placing barriers on the marketplace:** The new rules increase operational costs for social media companies. As they require to have Indian resident nodal officers, compliance officers, and physical offices in India. This will increase their operational costs significantly. Also, it will hamper the progress of multinational corporations and start-up intermediary enterprises in India.
4. **Revoke protection under Section 79 of IT Act:** Non-compliance with new rules will take away the protection granted to social media intermediaries under Section 79 of the IT Act.
 - o This section mentions that any **intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable** for any third-party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform.

View of Social media companies

WhatsApp filed a case [against the enforcement of New IT rules](#). During that, WhatsApp contested the following criticisms with the IT Act.

1. **Lack of stakeholder consultation:** The rules were notified in a short time without much public and stakeholder consultation. Social media companies like Facebook mention that they are ready to comply with the rules. But prior to that, they need to engage with the Government on certain genuine concerns with the rules. But the government provided no time for that.
2. **Legislative challenges:** Neither any Act (including **Information Technology Act**) nor any other law requires a social media intermediary to reveal the identity of the first originator of a message. Further, the IT Act **does not regulate digital media**. But, the new IT Rules for social media being subordinate to the IT Act overshoots the original intent and boundaries of the parent Act (IT Act).
3. **Altering the fundamental operation of Social media companies:** Under Section 79 (of IT Act) certain conditions attached to maintain the immunity of intermediaries. But the new IT Rules not only alter the provision of intermediary but also alter the entire function of a **Social media company as a Publisher**. This is against the provisions of the IT Act.
4. **Against Right to privacy:** The new rules **curtail free speech on digital platforms**. The Supreme court in its famous **Puttuswamy case** judgment mentioned that any law that impacts the fundamental right is void. Further, this iteration was also mentioned in the **Anuradha Bhasin case on Internet freedom**. Implementing the new IT Rules for social media will violate the judgment and its provisions.

Government argument in support of New IT rules for social media

1. **Social media companies are not legally intermediaries:** Legally the social media companies are not considered as an intermediary. Under section 2W of the IT Act, the definition of intermediary does not include Social media companies. This section mentions Intermediaries like internet service providers, online auction sites, online

marketplaces, etc. But under the rules, the government mentioned that the social media companies will be **treated as an intermediary** if they adhere to the new IT rules.

2. **Adherence to Indian laws and regulation:** Social media platforms use curated content for money-making and not take any editorial regulation. So far these social media platforms not followed specific Indian guidelines regarding the content on their platforms. The new IT rules aimed to change that perception. From now on the content in social media platforms will follow Indian publishing rules and regulations. Just like the print media is following during their publication.
3. **Benefits end-user:** The government underlines that these new IT rules on social media will benefits society at large. Such as,
 - **Secure right to privacy:** After the rules come into effect, users' personal photographs, personal data will remain safe with the user.
 - **Safety for vulnerable sections:** Children and women will now be safe and secure in Social media. The chances of cyber-bullying, exposure to obscene content, and harassment will reduce on social media platforms.
 - **Promote the integrity of the nation:** If the rules adhered to strictly, then any posts promoting a particular race, sex, caste, religion will reduce in time. This will promote India as a multi-cultural society.
 - **Security of state:** The social media companies will have to remove any posts that promote radicalism, online terrorism, violence over social media. Thus, it will weaken India's internal and external threats.

Suggestions

1. The focus should be on **strengthening citizen's rights by learning from successful global examples** like OFCOM (OFCOM is a communication regulator in the UK).
2. **Providing more time: Five industry bodies**, including the CII, FICCI, and the U.S.-India Business Council have **sought an extension of 6-12 months for compliance**. The government can provide time relaxation for compliance. In the meantime, the government can **bring together both the private and industry experts** to address genuine concerns.
3. **India did not have [General Data Protection Regulation or GDPR](#) like the EU:** The government instead of issuing IT rules can enact a [data protection law](#) in line with the GDPR. This will address the majority of the issues with the social media platform. Further, it will move a step ahead and force social media platforms to **store data within India** itself.

Conclusion

The New IT rules for social media alter the entire social media platform's function, responsibility, compliance, and user rights. But to get the desired outcome the rules alone are not sufficient. It **requires legislative backing** to regulate social media companies in India. The government can enact a **draft bill on the regulation of digital platforms** after the due consideration of the upcoming judgment of the Delhi High Court in the WhatsApp case. This will become a watershed moment that will transform the digital ecosystem in India.

Role of AYUSH during pandemic and its challenges – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a public health challenge. The burden of disease and mortality is steadily increasing in many parts of the country. Several social and economic factors are leading to devastating situations. Effective management to address this infection is still evolving and attempts are being made to **integrate traditional interventions along with standard care**.

In this regard, India is using the AYUSH system of medicine to provide relief and alleviate some symptoms of COVID-19. The AYUSH system is not seen as a cure, rather it is being used for the management of asymptomatic and mild cases of Covid-19 and for prophylactic (preventive) care. But despite that the Role of AYUSH during the pandemic is indispensable.

What is AYUSH?

- AYUSH stands for Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy.
- These systems are based on traditional medical philosophies. They represent a way of healthy living with established concepts on prevention of diseases and promotion of health.
- In 2015, the Ministry of Ayush had also **included Sowa Rigpa** into the AYUSH system.
- Benefits of AYUSH system:
 - It is generally cheap and affordable
 - AYUSH medicines have lesser side effects than modern medicine.
 - It has proven to be effective in lifestyle diseases like diabetes and hypertension
 - It is used to provide healthcare in rural hinterlands where there is a shortage of allopathic doctors.

Institutional Framework for AYUSH

- The **Ministry of AYUSH** is at the apex. It promotes and propagates Indian systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy.
- The **National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB)** coordinates activities relating to conservation, cultivation, marketing, export and policy-making for the development of the medicinal plant's sector.
- The **Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM)** and the **Central Council of Homoeopathy (CCH)** are two statutory regulatory bodies. They are responsible for –
 - laying down minimum standards of education,
 - recommending recognition of medical qualifications,
 - registering the practitioners and laying down ethical codes.
- There are **five research councils** that undertake officially sponsored research activities.
- The country also has **eight National Institutes for teaching the AYUSH system**. This includes the National Institute of Ayurveda, Jaipur; the National Institute of Siddha, Chennai etc.
- Four different Pharmacopoeia Committees work for preparing official formularies /pharmacopoeias (An official authoritative listing of drugs).
- They aim to evolve **uniform standards in preparation for drugs** in Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy.

Role of AYUSH medicines used during pandemic

The role of AYUSH medicines increased significantly during the pandemic. The AYUSH medicines and techniques used during the pandemic are,

- **Ayush-64:** It is an **Ayurvedic drug** developed by the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS). It is the apex body for research in Ayurveda under the Ministry of Ayush.
 - The drug was **originally developed** in 1980 **for** the management of **Malaria**. It has now been used for Covid-19 as its ingredients showed notable antiviral, immune-modulator, and antipyretic (anti-fever) properties.
- **Kabasura Kudineer:** It is a **Siddha medicine** for the treatment of fevers. It is now being used to treat asymptomatic, mild, and moderate COVID-19 infection cases.
 - It increases immunity and **acts as an immune-modulator** as this virus adversely affects the immune response.
- **Habb-e-Bukhar:** It is an **Unani drug** given to Covid-19 patients who are undergoing high fever.
- **Arsenicum album:** It is a **homoeopathy drug** considered correcting inflammation in the body. It takes care of diarrhoea, cough and cold.
 - It is recommended for prophylactic (preventive) use against Covid-19. Further, it is also found to be **useful in treating mucormycosis** (fungal infection).
- **Yogic Protocols:** They are used in the Covid-19 treatment centres to improve respiratory and cardiac efficiency, reduce stress and anxiety and enhance immunity. Asanas like Pranayama, Shavasana etc. are extremely beneficial in this regard.

Challenges faced by AYUSH medicines and practitioners

- **The tussle with Allopathic care:** Many allopathic doctors don't believe in the traditional system. They **question the credibility of AYUSH practitioners** and are against their inclusion into the modern health care system.
 - For instance, the **Indian Medical Association objected** to a recent gazette notification by the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM). As it allowed postgraduate **Ayurvedic doctors to perform 58 basic surgeries**.
- **Lacks in Validation:** Scientific validation of AYUSH medicines has not progressed despite dedicated government expenditure. There are very few AYUSH treatments that have been successfully validated by well-designed randomised controlled trials (RCTs).
- **Poor Quality of Practitioners:** The **practitioners lack quality** as Ayurvedic graduation and post graduation courses are often substandard and of poor quality.
 - **Most AYUSH institutions would have to shut down** if they were subjected to the same stringent norms that MBBS medical colleges are subjected to.
 - Further, due to **poor economic opportunities**, the AYUSH system **fails to attract** the country's best **talent**.
- **Overuse of AYUSH medicine:** They are sold as over the counter products and nutraceuticals to avoid regulation. Further, Ayurvedic stores do **not even have a legal requirement** of a pharmacist to dispense the medications unlike pharmacies selling modern medicine. This leads to greater consumption and enhanced self-medication.
 - There have been numerous cases of **terminal liver failure and irreversible organ damage** due to over consumption of herbal preparations.

Suggestions to improve the role of AYUSH

- Firstly, AYUSH practitioners **should follow the instructions issued from time to time** by the WHO, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Ministry of AYUSH. They should mould their advice as per the changing guidelines in order to administer proper treatment.
- Secondly, the [AYUSH sanjivani app's data](#) must be regularly assessed and evaluated in order to include/exclude the usage of traditional medicines in tackling the pandemic.
 - Sanjivani is a mobile app for impact assessment of the effectiveness, acceptance and usage of the different AYUSH advisories.
- Thirdly, the AYUSH medicines should be put through **rigorous trials** in order to be accepted as legitimate medications in the present times.
- Fourthly, the governments **must stop treating AYUSH education and practice with an excessively liberal mindset**. They should subject them to the same stringent norms and requirements expected from practitioners of modern medicine.
- Fifthly, the government should also focus on **Capacity-building of licensed AYUSH practitioners** through **bridge training** to meet India's primary care needs.
- **Sixthly, Cross-pathy** between the traditional and modern systems should be allowed to fill the lacunae in respective systems. However, this must be done after due deliberation with experts from the respective systems.
- Seventhly, the government should **create courses that produce qualified pharmacists** trained in AYUSH pharmacopeia, who can then be placed on thousands of AYUSH stores across the country.
- Lastly, every formulation of AYUSH medicine **must carry a label** detailing its ingredients, side effects and other important information as is mandated for modern medicines.

Conclusion

The pandemic has made us realize that no single health care system can provide satisfactory answers to all the health needs of modern society. There is a **need for an inclusive and integrated health care regime** that could guide health policies and programs in the future. **Medical pluralism** is here to stay and the [role of AYUSH sector](#) has a critical role to play in the new and emerging situation.

New Lakshadweep Regulations: Issues and Rationale – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

New Lakshadweep regulations proposed by its new administrator are attracting opposition from local leaders. The smallest union territory of India (Lakshadweep) is undergoing severe changes for the last few days. The [new administrator has introduced 4 new regulations](#) that would alter the culture, livelihood, ecology, and development level of the island.

The draft regulations include the Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation, 2021; the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA); the Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulation, 2021 and Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation 2021. They have attracted criticism from civil society as they place economic development over environmental sustainability. Furthermore, they jeopardize the pristine culture of the indigenous inhabitants.

The Home Ministry is currently scrutinising the draft legislation and would become law after their approval by the President.

Lakshadweep Regulations formulated by the Administrator

- 1. The Lakshadweep Development Authority Regulation, 2021:** It calls for the creation of a Lakshadweep Development Authority (LDA).
 - It will plan the development of any area identified as having a “bad layout or obsolete development”.
 - The act defines development as the carrying out of the building, engineering, mining, quarrying, or other operations in, on, over, or under the land. It also includes making any material change in any building or land or in the use of any building or land.
 - The authority could acquire any land required for a public purpose.
 - It stipulates that islanders must pay a processing fee for zone changes.
 - It establishes penalties such as imprisonment for obstructing the development work or workers.
- 2. The Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA):** It provides for the administrator to order the detention of a person for a period of up to one year.
 - It can be ordered if the offender’s **actions** adversely **affect the maintenance of public order**.
 - Such actions include when a person is a bootlegger, drug offender, immoral traffic offender, property grabber, etc. All these actions deemed to adversely affect the maintenance of public order.
- 3. The Animal Preservation Regulation, 2021:** It bans the slaughter of cows, calves, bulls, or bullocks. The slaughter of animals, other than cows or bulls, for religious purposes, will require a certificate from the authorities.
- 4. The Lakshadweep Panchayat Regulations, 2021:** It disqualifies people **with more than two children** from becoming gram panchayat members.
 - However, the law will not disqualify anyone having more than two children if they have been elected before the regulation has been notified.
 - The regulation also provides for the **reservation of 50 percent seats** in gram panchayats for women.

About the Lakshadweep Island

- It is a group of 36 coral islands in the Arabian Sea totaling 32 square kilometers.
- The name Lakshadweep in Malayalam and Sanskrit means ‘a hundred thousand islands’.

- It is a uni-district Union Territory (UT) and comprises 12 atolls, three reefs, five submerged banks, and ten inhabited islands.
- The natural landscapes, the sandy beaches, the abundance of flora and fauna, and the absence of a rushed lifestyle enhance the mystique of Lakshadweep.
- **Muslims** constitute more than 93% of the population and the majority of them belong to the Shafi School of the Sunni sect.
- **Malayalam** is spoken in all the islands except Minicoy where people speak Mahl. The society in all islands is **matriarchal**.
- The entire indigenous population has been classified as Scheduled Tribes because of their economic and social backwardness.

Constitutional Provisions related to Lakshadweep:

- **Article 239:** It states that every UT shall be administered by the President acting through an administrator appointed by him.
 - Since December 2020, Mr. Praful Patel is acting as administrator of Lakshadweep.
- **Article 240:** Under this, the President has the power to make regulations for the peace, progress, and good government of the Union territories. This includes Lakshadweep, Andaman, and the Nicobar Islands, Puducherry, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu.
 - Any regulation made by him/her may repeal or amend any Act made by Parliament which is for the time being applicable to the Union territory.
- **Article 241:** Parliament may by law constitute a High Court for a UT or declare any other court to be a high court for such UT.
 - The High court of Kerala functions as the High Court of Lakshadweep as well.
- **Article 243L:** It states that the provision of Part 9 (Panchayats) will apply to UTs. However, the application would be subject to exceptions and modifications made by the President through a public notification.
 - Lakshadweep consists of 10 Village panchayats whose members are directly elected.
- **Article 243ZB:** It states that the provision of Part 9A (Municipalities) will apply to UTs. However, an application would be subject to exceptions and modifications made by the President through a public notification

Arguments in favour of new Lakshadweep Regulations

- **Firstly**, the government has brought new rules for **augmenting the development potential of the island**. They will ease the procedural and regulatory requirements for land acquisition thereby enabling faster development of infrastructure.
- **Secondly**, the new provisions would **boost the tourism potential** of the island. The government intends to develop Lakshadweep into “a renowned international tourist destination” like the Maldives.
- **Thirdly**, the government believes that new rules will help in **realizing the objectives of the Holistic Development of Islands Program**.
 - The program focuses on the creation of jobs for the islanders through tourism promotion as well as the export of seafood and coconut-based products made in the Islands.
 - The Island Development Agency (IDA) was constituted in 2017 under the aegis of the Home Ministry to look into the holistic development of islands.
- **Fourthly**, regulations like the Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation (PASA) are essential for **augmenting the security situation** in the UT.

- In March, about 300 kg of heroin and five AK 47 rifles, and 1,000 live rounds were confiscated in Lakshadweep. The coast guard had intercepted the consignment and registered a case.
- Several states, including Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh have similar regulations.
- **Fifthly**, the Panchayat regulations will pave the way for **the upliftment and empowerment of women**. The reservation would generate more women representatives who would create gender-sensitive policies.

Arguments against the new Lakshadweep Regulations

- **Firstly**, they seem to **fulfill the interest of commercial developers** rather than the indigenous islanders. The developmental plan can be used to vacate land which may later be sold to outsiders.
- **Secondly**, the powers **bestowed on Land development authorities are very wide**. It can prepare comprehensive development plans for any area and relocate people regardless of their will.
 - Further, the new rules put the onus on the owner to develop his holding as per the development plan or bear a heavy penalty in case of non-compliance. This may increase **forcible eviction and relocation of masses**.
- **Thirdly**, the new rules may **hamper the cultural milieu** of the region. They allow for the intrusion of outsiders in the region which may destroy the way of life practiced by indigenous people for generations.
 - Further, the cow slaughter ban and allowance of alcohol consumption go against the cultural practice of the 96% Muslim population of the region.
- **Fourthly**, the ease in approvals may **hamper the pristine ecological environment** of the region. The tourism infrastructure will adversely impact the fragile coastal ecosystem of the region.
- **Fifthly**, it is difficult to understand the rationale behind PASA as UT possesses one of the lowest crime rates in the country. According to NCRB data, only 121 cases of crime registered on the islands in 2017, 86 in 2018, 186 in 2019, and 89 in 2020.
 - It may be misused to **curtail free speech and the right to protest** of the masses.
- **Sixthly**, the two children cap for panchayat elections seems unjust in a UT with a very low fertility rate. According to the National Health and Family Survey-5 (2019-20), the **total fertility rate is 1.4** (which is far behind the national average of 2.2).
- **Seventhly**, the UT has developed quite well over the years and doesn't require such radical reforms.
 - The island has a robust infrastructure to support rainwater harvesting and solar power generation.
 - All islands have been connected by helicopter service since 1986, and high-speed passenger boats were purchased in the 1990s to improve connectivity.
 - The literacy rate of UT is over 90% and the poverty line in terms of GDP is only slightly higher than the World Bank's poverty threshold.
 - It also has a desalination wind-powered plant gifted by the Danish government.

Suggestions

- The new laws **should be discussed with the concerned stakeholders** including the local fisherman and civil society. Their grievances should be heard and rectified for ensuring greater acceptability.

- The focus should be placed on addressing the real problems of the Island. This includes:
 - Focusing on addressing the rising income disparities in the region
 - Restricting Indiscriminate trawling as it endangers the coral landscape. The Maldives had already banned trawling activities after witnessing excessive exploitation.
 - Restraining from relaxing the quarantine norms as the UT is witnessing a Covid -19 surge
- The **President must refrain from giving assent** to the new laws and should send them back for due reconsideration.
- The **issue also provides the Parliament an opportunity to draft a reasonable law** that can prevent a single individual (the nominated administrator) from undermining people's will.
- **A blind copy of the Maldives model should be avoided.** For instance, the expensive Water bungalows are hazardous to the corals. Also, they would collapse in Lakshadweep's turbulent monsoon.

Conclusion

There is a need to redesign new laws to reflect a people-centric approach. The current situation warrants due consultation with the concerned stakeholders so as to fix the lacunas and strive towards attaining sustainable development.