

Forum IAS

7 PM COMPILATION

15th to 30th November, 2021

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic
- ❖ Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer
- ❖ Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world
- ❖ Written in lucid language and point format
- ❖ Wide use of charts, diagrams and info graphics
- ❖ Best-in class coverage, critically acclaimed by aspirants
- ❖ Out of the box thinking for value edition
- ❖ Best cost-benefit ratio according to successful aspirants

Ecological Significance of Bats – Explained, pointwise

Topic:-Environment

Sub topic:-Ecology and Environment

[Yojana October Summary] SVAMITVA Scheme – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Schemes and Programmes

Sub topic:- SVAMITVA Schemes

A new Global Arms Race: Causes and implications – Explained, pointwise

Topic:-International Relations

Sub topic:- Arms Race

[Yojana October Summary] Gram Panchayat Development Plans – Explained, pointwise

Topic:-Schemes and Programmes

Sub topic:- Gram Panchayat Development

Draft Personal Data Protection Bill – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Bills and Acts

Sub topic:- Data Protection Bill

Cryptocurrencies in India: Ban or Regulation? – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Economy

Sub topic:- Cryptocurrencies

NFHS-5 and its findings – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Schemes and Programmes

Sub topic:- NFHS Survey

[Yojana October Summary] Digital Local Governance – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Schemes and Programmes

Sub topic:- Digital Local Governance

Challenges facing Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Agriculture

Sub topic:-Legalisation of MSP

India-Turkey relations – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- International Relations

Sub topic:- Relations

ASER Survey and issues in school education – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Education

Sub topic:- Aser Survey

S-400 Triumf Missile system – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Science and Technology

Sub topic:- Defence System

Ecological Significance of Bats – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Bats are known or suspected to be the natural reservoirs for many novel and recently emerged pathogenic viruses such as Nipah, Hendra, Marburg, [Ebola](#) and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus. There is increasing scientific evidence that the SARS-CoV2 virus that causes COVID-19 also originated in bats.

In India, many people are dependent on the ecosystems they live in, and the various services those ecosystems provide, for example, water, clean air and pollination. This raises questions about protecting bats staying in close vicinity to people.

About Bats

There are nearly 128 species of Bats present in India; over 1,200 species of bats exist worldwide. They emerge from their roosts in trees, caves, rock ledges, temples and buildings.

Read more: [All you need to know about Nipah virus](#)

Significance of Bats

Environmental benefits: They devour insects, including agricultural pests and disease-causing mosquitoes; in farms, fields, forests, grasslands and around human settlements.

Some bats' sip nectar, pollinate flowers, eat fruits, and spread the seeds of many important tree species including wild varieties of bananas, guava, cashew, mango, figs, mahua and other fruits.

Economic and Social benefit: A study in Thailand has shown that **pest biocontrol** provided by just one species of bat **prevented the loss** of 2,900 tons of rice per year — equivalent to savings of \$1.2 million, and provision of meals for 26,200 people annually.

Bat droppings (**guano**) mined from caves are widely used as a **fertilizer** for agricultural crops, as they have high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorous.

Read more: [Govt. report flags lapses in “filovirus study” among Nagaland bats](#)

What are the challenges associated with bats and their harms?

No proper study: There is almost no study on the ecosystem services provided by bats in India. So, there is a widespread misunderstanding of bats and their critical role.

Growing fears of disease spread: Due to COVID-19, the world has suddenly become aware of the several viruses bats carry because they could spill over to humans. So, there is a growing fear among people about further disease transmission from bats. But such spillovers are unusual and rare events and tend to occur when there is increased contact between humans and wild hosts.

Read more: [Covid-19 pandemic cut life expectancy by most since World War II](#)

Why do bats never fall sick?

Bats are reservoirs for viruses, but they never fall sick. Flying results in toxic by-products that could damage cell contents. Bats have evolved mechanisms to avoid such damage by suppressing their immune systems.

Scientists think that such suppression results in a continuous auto-immune response, which helps them combat infections and control virus propagation. This ability to limit excessive inflammatory response ensures they do not overreact to viral infections and protects them from multiple chronic age-related diseases.

Note: Inflammatory response is responsible for the adverse effects of such viruses in infected humans.

Why is there a higher susceptibility of spread of disease from bats now?

Over the last several 100 years, humans have significantly modified the surrounding landscapes. This results in disturbances to bat roosts and forcing them to change their 'homes'. For example, activities such as mining destroy the natural cave systems that bats live in.

Scientists have shown that **when bats are disturbed**, they become stressed and could shed viruses that they carry, increasing the risk of spillover to humans. This suggests that human habitat destruction makes bats move closer to human habitation, resulting in stressing them, and in turn **viral shedding**.

What can be done?

Maintaining ecological balance: The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled humans to maintain a fine ecological balance and ensure humans – Bats co-existence. This is important for the cure for SARS.

Conduct adequate study: Adequate study has to be conducted to know more about the ecology of bats, even in the context of viruses. A study has to be conducted to find out about viruses shed by bats and their time, either throughout the year or seasonally.

Note: The rich biodiversity and cultural diversity in India serve as an excellent and unique place for such studies. The National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS-TIFR), an aided Centre of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) is carrying out sero-ecological studies on the human-bat interface among Bomrr clan in Nagaland.

The NCBS is also in the process of sequencing whole genomes of bat viruses. This study could help build a bank of virus genomes.

Use traditional knowledge: Several indigenous people had understood the importance of giving enough space to all animals, including bats. For instance, some tribes have isolation practices such as quarantine following hunting. The **Bomrr clan in Nagaland** have traditionally celebrated the annual bat harvest for many years. Yet, there has been no major disease outbreak among the Bomrr clan. So, local practices and traditions could serve as a guide for minimising the risk of infectious disease spillover from bats in the future.

Make sensible precautions: Such as minimise direct interactions with bats by avoiding handling or eating bats, and not eating fallen fruits gnawed by them.

In the **longer term**, people should work towards **restricting and reversing land-use change practices** that are bringing us in greater contact with animals that may harbour 'emerging infections'.

[Yojana October Summary] SVAMITVA Scheme – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

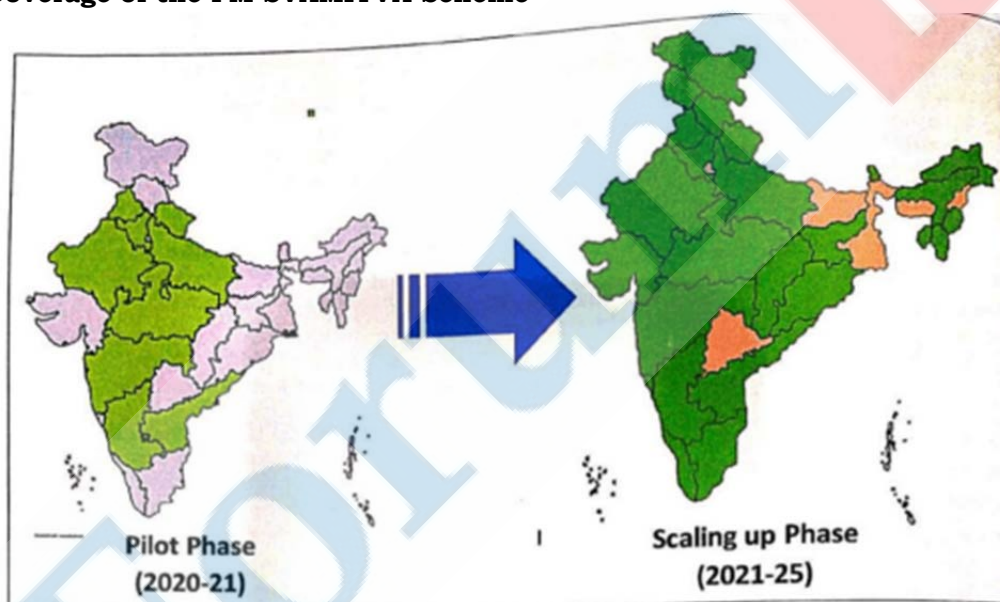
The PM SVAMITVA Scheme (Survey of Villages Abadi and Mapping with Improvised Technology in Village Areas) aims to provide the 'record of rights' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas and issuance of property cards to the property owners.

Property owners in rural inhabited areas can download the Aadhaar authenticated property card on their mobile phones through the DigiLocker application.

Based on the Socio-Economic and Caste Census-2011 (SECC-2011) estimates of rural areas in India, the number of households expected to be benefitted from the Scheme is approx. 13.13 crores.

About the objectives of the PM SVAMITVA Scheme

1. Leveraging property as a financial asset by the citizens of rural India, 2. Creation of accurate land records for rural planning, 3. Provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India, 4. Serve as a means of reduction in property-related disputes, 5. Facilitate the determination of property tax, 6. Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS (Geographic Information System) maps that can be used by any department or agency.

Coverage of the PM SVAMITVA Scheme

Source: PIB

The pilot phase of the Scheme was rolled out in April 2020 in six States. Namely, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

Based on the successful implementation and outcome of the pilot phase, the Scheme was rolled out for implementation across all States/UTs on 24 April 2021.

So far, 28 States and UTs have signed MoU with **Survey of India for implementation of SVAMITVA Scheme** in their States/UTs. The State of Tamil Nadu is in the final stages of signing MoU for pilot villages.

What are the achievements of the PM SVAMITVA Scheme so far?

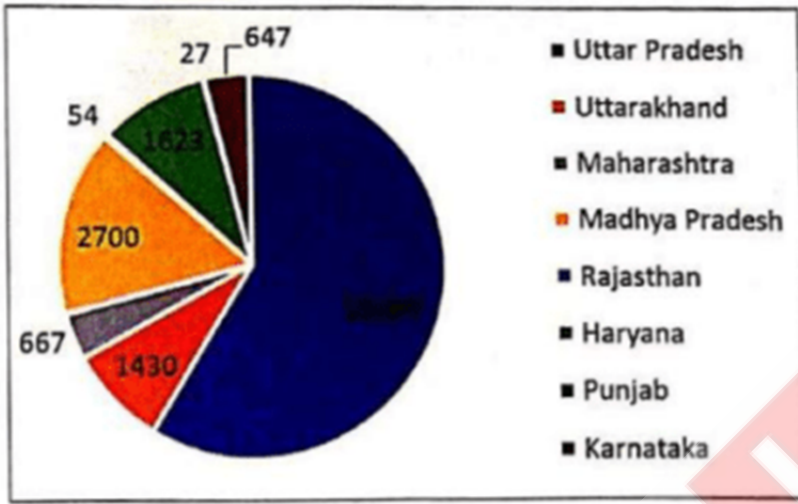


Figure 3: Number of villages where property cards have been distributed

As of September 2021, drone flying has been completed in 59,145 villages across nine States. Property cards have been distributed in approx 17,000 villages, which comprise nearly 17 lakh property owners.

Many property owners have also started availing of loans through property cards for constructing houses or setting up small businesses.

There have also been instances of settlement of long pending property disputes among residents of villages during the implementation of the Scheme.

Why the PM SVAMITVA Scheme is needed?

No proper record available for household owners: As far as non-agricultural property rights in rural India are concerned, very few studies exist that provide statistical estimates of the record of rights for residential land in rural India. The surveys like the [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\)](#) or India Human Development Survey (IHDS) take into account either the agricultural land or all land without segregating the inhabited (abadi) land.

High rural indebtedness for rural household assets: When it comes to access to institutional credit, as per the **Household Assets and Indebtedness Survey 2013** conducted by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**, about 20% of households have reported outstanding credit with non-institutional lenders, while the same number is at 10% for urban India.

The land retains a high share of total assets in India: In India, an average household has 77% of its total assets in real estate (residential buildings, buildings used for farms and non-farm activities, constructions such as recreational facilities, and rural and urban land). This is high when compared to the USA (40%), China(60%), Thailand(50%) and the UK(35%).

What are the challenges in the traditional land survey method?

Multiple issues: Traditional surveying techniques generally require line-of-sight and a clear vision of the whole area to be surveyed. Further, the surveyor has to move with measuring instruments from one place to another for demarcating property parcels. This methodology of

land survey is laborious, time-consuming, expensive, and prone to human as well as instrumental errors.

Lack of Record of Rights (RoR) in the rural inhabited areas in India results in a low level of land governance, presumptive ownership of properties, long pending property-related disputes and illiquid land market in rural areas.

What are the major advantages of the PM SVAMITVA Scheme?

Use digital technologies: SVAMITVA Scheme uses the combination of **Survey Grade Drones and CORS network** (Continuously Operated Reference Stations) to accurately survey large areas in a very short span of time. This has the following advantages, 1. Provide very high accuracy and high-resolution maps, 2. Provide editable and Geo-tagged Maps, 3. Creation of the most durable record of property holdings in areas with no legacy revenue records, 4. Provide a clear demarcation of land holdings in a very short time, 5. Free from measurement errors to a large extent.

What are the other benefits provided by PM SVAMITVA Scheme?

Provide access to institutional credit: In the absence of a legal document, the owner of the property in the rural areas is not able to leverage it as a financial asset acceptable by the banks to provide loans and other financial assistance. With the PM SVAMITVA Scheme, rural areas can get easy access to formal credit.

Benefits to Gram Panchayats: The creation of accurate land records and GIS maps will support Panchayats in the preparation of a better-quality [Gram Panchayat Development Plan \(GPDP\)](#).

Through the accurate determination of properties and transparent land titles, Gram Panchayats will be able to streamline their property tax determination and collections in the States in which they are devolved to them.

Trickle-down benefits of CORS: 567 CORS network will be established as a public infrastructure over the course of the Scheme. This will facilitate geo-positioning services and other developmental activities by any department or agency.

Will provide impetus to the drone ecosystem: Currently, there are nearly 119 drones deployed in various States for conducting drone surveys and the number will soon increase to 300. The [Production-Linked Incentive \(PLI\) Scheme](#) of the Ministry of Civil Aviation will provide opportunities for Startups and MSMEs.

Thus, SVAMITVA Scheme aims for the holistic development of Gram Panchayat through the empowerment of villages and their residents, which will eventually make rural India Atmanirbhar.

A new Global Arms Race: Causes and implications – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

A new global arms race is brewing up as US, China and Russia are all pursuing hypersonic weapons technologies.

The US administration is making a big push for hypersonic-related research funding in the fiscal year 2022 budget and has requested \$3.8 billion in budget. This is almost 20% more than the Trump administration's allocation of \$3.2 billion for fiscal year 2021.

China, apart from enhancing its military capabilities, has also been pursuing the development of hypersonic capabilities for a decade now. Its recent testing of nuclear-capable hypersonic weapons system was compared to the Sputnik moment, by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US.

Similarly, Russia is also developing hypersonic weapons technology and has recently tested a hypersonic cruise missile – [Zircon](#).

Moreover, the US and UK announced recently that they will help Australia build a new fleet of nuclear submarines, as part of a trilateral alliance known as [Aukus](#) to counteract the influence of China.

All of these are indicators of a spiraling new arms race.

What are hypersonic weapons?

Hypersonic weapons travel faster than five times the speed of sound. At hypersonic speeds, the air molecules around the flight vehicle start to change, breaking apart or gaining a charge in a process called **ionization**. This subjects the hypersonic vehicle to “tremendous” stresses as it pushes through the atmosphere

There are generally two categories of hypersonic weapons:

- **Cruise missiles** powered by engines
- **Glide vehicles**, are launched nearly into space before diving back down to their targets.

[Read more](#) about Hypersonic missiles

What are the causes behind this new arms race?**i). US withdrawal from treaties –**

– **INF Treaty**: The United States withdrew from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in 2019. This treaty had been in place since the Cold War. It banned both the Soviet Union (Russia) and the US from developing and deploying land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km. However, treaty did not apply to air-or sea-launched missiles. Russia also suspended its participation in the treaty.

– **ABM Treaty**: Since the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty in 2002, both Russia and China have been wary of Washington's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme. The treaty, barred Washington and Moscow from deploying nationwide defenses against strategic ballistic missiles.

– **JCPOA**: Since the US' withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), tensions between the US and Iran are at an all-time high. Iran has breached the agreement terms multiple times since then, and announced that it would no longer be bound by any operational limitations of the JCPOA,

ii). US-China conflict: US-China conflict has escalated over the years. One of its facet was the recent trade war between the two economies. The race for global supremacy and mutual distrust often permeates into military domain, leading to the development of weapon systems.

China is concerned that U.S. hypersonic weapons could enable the United States to conduct a preemptive, decapitating strike on China's nuclear arsenal and supporting infrastructure. U.S. missile defense deployments could then limit China's ability to conduct a retaliatory strike against the United States.

iii). Russia – US conflict: Though [Russian research on hypersonic technology](#) dates back to the 1980s, the program began to pick up momentum after the U.S. withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002. President Vladimir Putin has identified this as a key reason for Russian development of hypersonics.

iv). China & Russia's view of US BMD: A robust Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) compromises the second strike capability of the enemy by neutralising the surviving incoming missiles in case of a near-decapitating first strike. Both Russia and China thus view the US BMD as undermining their deterrence and have sought ways to restore their retaliatory strike capability by investing in new technologies. These mostly include the hypersonic weapons systems, including Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs) that can escape the missile defence systems.

v). Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons: Russia recently conducted an ASAT test. India had conducted similar ASAT test under [Mission Shakti](#) in 2019. There are approximately two dozen countries that possess ballistic missiles or satellite launch capability that can jeopardize human access to space. An indiscriminate development of ASAT systems can be a precursor to a new age space arms race.

Indicative of an emerging Chinese and Russian dominance in space, the USA established a space force in 2019.

Must Read: [Which countries have Hypersonic Glide Vehicles \(HGV\)?](#)

Why China's testing of nuclear-capable hypersonics is being compared to the Sputnik moment?

The launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957 was viewed as a symbol of American weakness and a sign of Soviet superiority in technology, both by the people and policymakers in the US. The shock was worsened by the suddenness of the event, with US intelligence agencies being taken by complete surprise.

China's testing of its nuclear-capable hypersonic weapons system is likely to trigger events similar to those that the Sputnik launch set in motion.

The launch of Sputnik, triggered a ballistic missile race that saw Russia and the USA come close to a disastrous faceoff during the Cuban missile crisis.

The Chinese tests have the potential to set off a similar aggressive competition among the nuclear powers to modernise their nuclear arsenals and add new, potentially destabilising capabilities to their arsenal.

What are the implications?

– **Action-reaction cycle:** Experts consider the hypersonic weapons highly destabilising, due to their stealth and exceptional manoeuvrability. The US is already developing conventional long-range hypersonic missiles. With the Chinese test, the US may be forced to expand its hypersonic programme and further modernise its missile defence systems. This proliferates an action-reaction cycle wherein countries start building their weapon capabilities as a reaction to enemy state's weapon development programme.

– **Impact on India:** India may also be forced to accelerate its hypersonic missiles programme and consider erecting an equally robust missile defence. India is reportedly developing a dual-capable hypersonic cruise missile and an anti-ship hypersonic missile. Chinese advancement

in stealth technologies will push New Delhi to seek similar capabilities and development of effective countermeasures. This can then set off a regional arms race, a sign that is not particularly encouraging for **regional peace**.

– **Drain of resources:** Even as the pandemic devastated lives and economies around the world, spending on nuclear weapons by the world's nine nuclear states witnessed an increase of \$1.4bn from the previous year. This is a massive drain on public resources globally.

What is the way forward?

Author Nitin Pai (*Livemint*) suggests that *'There is an urgent case for a **strict international ASAT non-proliferation and test-ban treaty** to prevent militarisation of space'*

As per author Laura Grego (*Financial Times*) *'The parties to the **1970 nuclear non-proliferation treaty**, including the P5 nuclear weapon states, are obliged to pursue negotiations on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race. They will meet in January 2022 to take stock of their progress. Diplomacy, hence, is the only way forward.'*

Conclusion

The enmity created by nations threatening each other with indiscriminate, weapons of mass destruction prevents development of global solidarity and trust we need to address challenges like the climate crisis and pandemics.

[Yojana October Summary] Gram Panchayat Development Plans – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

Over the past few decades, there have been significant developments in the devolution of powers to Gram Panchayats (GPs). The preparation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) was institutionalised during the Financial Year 2015-16. Recently, more than 95% of GPs (2.56 lakh of the total 2.69 lakh GPs) participated in the planning process and uploaded their plans on eGramSwaraj portal.

About Gram Panchayat Development Plan

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment created a formal three-tier structure of decentralised local governance for rural India. It also provided a special emphasis on the inclusion of women, SCs, STs, and other marginalised communities.

Article 243G of the Indian Constitution mandates economic development and social justice through an inclusive, community-driven, and holistic planning process of the Panchayat System (GPDP), thereby evolving into institutions of local self-governance.

GPDP process facilitates decentralised planning by the community members of the village. The GPDP planning process should be comprehensive and participatory by involving full convergence with the schemes of all related Central Ministries / Line Departments.

How funding is done for the implementation of GPDP?

The sectoral fund allocation for GPDP is limited to a few areas where core funding is provided either from Central or State Finance Commission Funds and Schemes like [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme \(MGNREGS\)](#).

Evolution of GPDPs and planning process

Successive Finance Commissions have recommended large distribution of funds to Gram Panchayats. So, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has made the preparation of GPDP a mandatory activity by Gram Panchayats (GPs).

The Ministry had framed Model GPDP Guidelines in 2015. Subsequently, the new restructured comprehensive GPDP Guidelines were released in 2018. Along with the new guidelines, special emphasis was given to GPDP by rolling out the People's Plan Campaign for greater emphasis on the preparation of the plan.

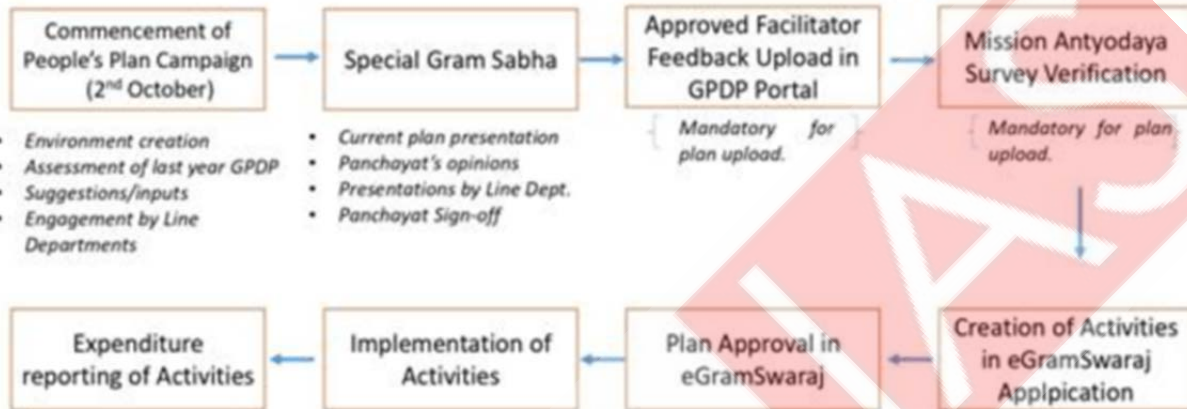
Read more: [Sabki Yojna Sabka Vikas campaign for inclusive and holistic preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plan\(GPDP\)](#)



GPDP Creation Process



PPC is co-ordinated by Department of Panchayati Raj (DoPR) at State Level. DoPR shall process the implementation of following activities in time bound manner:



Source: PIB

Objectives of Gram Panchayat Development Plan

- Ensuring integrated and inclusive development of the rural areas. This not only includes infrastructure oriented development but also social, economic, and community development;
- To enable and engage the community in participatory planning and decision-making processes;
- To ensure identification of locally available resources and addressing local needs through participatory planning and convergence;
- To ensure the inclusion and welfare of SCs, STs, OBCs, women and others in the formulation and implementation of the GPDP to ensure the provision of basic social goods and life of dignity;
- Ensure efficacy and efficiency in public service delivery in local areas;
- Strengthening accountability measures at the local level.

How is the government improving the GPDP?

Untied grants from Fifteenth Finance Commission: The commission has recommended 40% of the grant as untied grants and the remaining 60% as tied grants. Regarding Tied Grants, 30% of the total grants be utilised for drinking water, rainwater harvesting and water recycling. Untied grants can be used for felt needs under the 29 subjects enlisted in the XI Schedule, except for salaries and other establishment costs.

People's Plan Campaign: Since 2018, the GPDP preparation has been taken up in a mission mode through the People's Plan Campaign (Sabki Yojana Sabka Vikas) annually across the country.

Read more: [Union Minister Shri Giriraj Singh launches People's Plan Campaign 2021 and Vibrant Gram Sabha Dashboard](#)

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan: The scheme was launched by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. The scheme lay great emphasis on Capacity Building and training of Elected Representatives (ERs) and other stakeholders. In the last three years, it has trained 110 lakh ERs and stakeholders.

PRI-SHG convergence: Ministry of Panchayati Raj initiated this convergence to promote community engagement to frame a more sustainable and inclusive GPDP. A special provision for integrating poverty reduction plans into GPDP has also been initiated.

Case Study: Ibrahimpur, Telangana

Ibrahimpur village is a great example of a participatory governance model. The village conducted Gram Sabha meetings regularly where citizens discuss their needs and ways to address challenges. Based on their participatory planning, they provide,

1. Excellent delivery of services like safe drinking water with minimum charges, 2. 100% sanitation facility, 3. Effective water conservation, 4. Provision of Organic manure, 5. Mosquito-free village, 6. Solar lights for village households, 7. Banned the single-use of plastics, 7. Installed an 'Any Time Water Machine', which allows locals to fill up 20-litre cans at least two to three times a day.

On the social front, the village achieved, 1. 100 per cent enrolment of children in schools ensured proper implementation of Mid Day Meals, 2. Modern facilities for digital/online classes in classrooms, 3. 100% immunisation targets, 4. Ensured 100% institutional delivery, 5. 60 milch animals were provided at subsidised rates to villagers.

For its efforts, the village has won several awards including Nirmal Puraskar Award and Best Gram Panchayat Award for the development activities over the last few years.

What needs to be done?

Converge resources: Allocation in the areas of road construction, water, and sanitation is comparatively higher in percentage to other sectors. Further, Several government departments implement developmental programmes at the GP level, but often the programmes are run by individual departments, so there may be duplication of efforts. It clearly shows that there is a greater need for Gram Panchayats to converge resources available from other schemes.

Integrated planning: The guidelines of all the Centrally Sponsored Schemes are implemented at the GP level such as MGNREGA, DAY-NRLM, [SBM\(G\)](#), [POSHAN](#), etc. This insists preparation of plans with a holistic view. So, all plans of the line departments including the labour budget should emanate from GPDP.

Such an integrated plan will help 1. To absorb more funds from different sectors; 2. Increase local resource mobilisation; 3. Facilitate improvement of service delivery; 4. Avoid duplication; 5. Reduce the financial burden; and 6. Accelerate the achievement of desired results.

Shift the focus from 'GPDP numbers to 'GPDP quality': More than 95% of Gram Panchayats are preparing GPDPs. So, now is the time to shift focus on the quality of GPDPs to transform the GPDPs from mere wishlists.

The concerned Ministries along with democratic institutions, and the people-centred approach of the GPDP will lead to build-up of physical, financial, social and capital, and long term sustainable development at the village level.

Draft Personal Data Protection Bill – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

After almost two years of deliberation and scrutiny, the Joint Committee of Parliament on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 has finalised its recommendations and is the Bill likely to be tabled in the upcoming winter session of Parliament. The committee, headed by P P Chaudhary, suggests a two-year period before operationalising the Data Protection law. The bill has seen several changes to the original draft drawn by retired Supreme Court Justice B N Srikrishna.

The Personal Data Protection Bill seeks to usher in a data governance architecture in India that fills an existing void in the institutional framework. It seeks to put in place safeguards to protect personal data, ensure privacy, and bring about transparency and accountability in data management.

About the draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019

KEY TERMS IN DATA PROTECTION

DATA PRINCIPAL: The person to whom the data in consideration belong¶

DATA PROCESSOR: A person, state, company or any other entity which processes data on behalf of someone else¶

DATA FIDUCIARY: A person, state, company or any other judicial entity which control the various aspects related to data storage and defines how it can be processed¶

PERSONAL DATA: Any data set that may contain information that can reveal personal traits of a human

being, and can be used to single out the person¶

NON-PERSONAL DATA: Datasets which do not contain any personal information and instead have information detailing the larger trends such as the income group of a town, the average age, the male-to-female-population ratio, etc¶

DATA PROTECTION AUTHORITY: A regulatory body for the Act which can have adjudicating powers and pass executive instructions in cases of conflict between two parties under the Data Protection Act

Source: IE

Personal data definition: The Bill defines ‘personal data’ as any information which renders an individual identifiable. Also, it defines data ‘processing’ as collection, manipulation, sharing or storage of data.

Territorial applicability: The Bill includes the processing of personal data by both government and private entities incorporated in India, and also the entities incorporated overseas if they systematically deal with data principals within the territory of India.

Grounds for data processing: The Bill allows data processing by fiduciaries if consent is provided by the individual.

Sensitive personal data: Sensitive personal data defined in the Bill includes passwords, financial data, biometric and genetic data, caste, religious or political beliefs. The Bill specifies more stringent grounds for the processing of sensitive personal data, such as seeking explicit consent of an individual prior to processing.

Data Protection Authority: The Bill provides for the establishment of a Data Protection Authority (DPA). The DPA is empowered to 1. Draft specific regulations for all data fiduciaries across different sectors, 2. Supervise and monitor data fiduciaries.

Cross-border storage of data: The Bill states that every fiduciary shall keep a ‘serving copy’ of all personal data in a server or data centre located in India.

Transfer of data outside the country: Personal data (except sensitive personal data which is ‘critical’) may be transferred outside India under certain circumstances.

What are the key recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Personal Data Protection Bill?

-Favours widening the ambit of the personal data protection bill, bringing in non-personal data under its scope.

-**Social media platforms:** Bringing all social media intermediaries under the ambit by re-designating them as social media platforms. While the committee has suggested **all social media platforms** (which do not act as intermediaries) be treated **as publishers**.

A regulator should be set up along the lines of the Press Council of India to regulate social media companies. A mechanism may be devised for social media platforms to be held accountable for content coming from unverified accounts.

Note: *The panel said that though social media (SM) platforms were designated as intermediaries under the [IT Act](#), the law failed to regulate the SM platforms adequately.*

-Consider an individual's '**right to be forgotten**' by clarifying the responsibilities of data fiduciaries, but it also noted that this may depend on available technology and practicability of applications.

-**Create an alternative to the SWIFT system of funds transfer:** 1. Ensure privacy and avoid instances of breaches by Chinese lending apps in India, 2. Boost domestic economy.

-Ensure that a **mirror copy of the sensitive and critical personal data** which is already in possession of the foreign entities be mandatorily brought to India in a time-bound manner.

-Additional compliance for companies that deal exclusively with children's data, by asking them to register with the Data Protection Authority.

-**Inclusion of hardware manufacturers:** Bill favours bringing in data collection by electronic hardware under this law. The committee dismisses the difference between electronic hardware and software.

-**Formal certification process** for all digital and IoT devices (sensors, gadgets) to ensure their integrity by setting up labs throughout the country.

-Centre "must ensure data localisation clauses are followed in letter and spirit by all local and foreign entities, and India must move towards data localisation gradually".

Why does India need a Data Protection law?

Amid the proliferation of computers and the Internet, consumers have been generating a lot of data, which has allowed companies to show them personalised advertisements based on their browsing patterns and other online behaviour.

Companies began to store a lot of these datasets without taking the consent of the users and did not take responsibility when the data got leaked. To hold such companies accountable, a Personal Data Protection law is needed.

What are the concerns associated with the draft bill?

Issues with Sections 35 and 12: Under Section 35, the Centre can exempt any agency of the government from the application of all provisions of the Act; when it is deemed to be in national and public interest.

Similarly, Section 12(a)(i) creates the space to exempt the government from provisions of consent, allowing it to collect personal data without individual approval. These blanket exemptions is a cause of concern.

Ambiguity regarding data localisation: The bill makes a concerted push towards data localisation. But whether or not it will be implemented in a graded manner, depending on the sensitivity of data, is unclear.

Absence of a comprehensive surveillance framework: The bill does not have provisions for the creation of an oversight mechanism. The Data Protection Authority had been entrusted with a wide variety of functions, ranging from standard-setting to adjudication. This will end up “overburdening” the architecture.

Powers and functions of the Data Protection Authority: Enforcement of penalties and compensation orders of the DPA does not require a court order. The Bill does not specify that a court order would be required for the enforcement actions.

Read more: [Issue of privacy and Personal Data Protection Bill 2019](#)

What should India do to ensure data protection?

The data regulator plays a crucial role between all vested stakeholders that is citizens, businesses and the government themselves. So, the **functional and structural independence of the data regulator** should be a key aspect of the implementation of the bill.

There should be a **statutory media regulatory authority** to regulate the content of such media irrespective of where their content is published — online, print or otherwise.

Suggestions to improve committee recommendations

-Non-personal data has mainly a business dimension and is commercially critical for firms. With India’s internet economy taking off, the government should not club personal data and non-personal data.

-The committee recommended that individuals have to be alerted to a data breach of any entity collecting their data. But it has to be automatic and unconditional to help victims take precautions such as changing passwords.

-Data captured by electronic hardware should clarify whether the data include data generated by a company’s internal functions or not.

Data protection is a must in the age of digital era. With the right to privacy being a fundamental right and the recent rise in risks to the privacy of individuals, data protection law is the need of the hour. Parliament must scrutinise the issues in greater detail, tighten the framework, and move quickly to usher in a data protection architecture in India.

Cryptocurrencies in India: Ban or Regulation? – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The contentious topic of cryptocurrency ban or regulation is garnering headlines as the Government announced that it's planning to move a [Bill regulating private cryptocurrencies](#) in India during the upcoming winter session of the Parliament.

While the details of the bill are still awaited, the topic merits a discussion.

What are private cryptocurrencies?

Whatever cryptocurrency is not issued by the government, can be considered private, though there is **no clear definition** of private cryptocurrency.

The Ministry of Finance in its 2019 report, *Report of the Committee to propose specific actions to be taken in relation to Virtual Currencies*, recommended that

– ‘All private cryptocurrencies, except any cryptocurrency which may be issued by the government, be banned in India’.

Going by this recommendation, the government may categorise any cryptocurrency that is not issued by the government as a private cryptocurrency’

What are some benefits of Cryptocurrencies?

Cryptocurrencies are getting popular because of their underlying technology of Blockchain, and due to some of their inherent advantages over fiat currencies, like

– Transactions in Cryptocurrencies are **faster** and require **less or no additional transaction fees**.

– Crypto also **doesn't require any middleman** like traditional fiat currency transactions do in the form of the banks.

– Each cryptocurrency transaction is a **unique exchange between two parties**, which protects users from issues like identity theft. Privacy is maintained.

– **Financial inclusion**: More people now have access to the internet than banks or other currency exchange systems. This opens the opportunity for reaching out to the unbanked populations of the world.

– International transactions usually have to be done with currency exchanges that involve third parties. Cryptocurrency allows two parties to **transact without requiring any third party and the added fees**.

Must Read: [What are the benefits of Blockchain?](#)

What are the various concerns against Cryptocurrencies?

The concerns over money laundering and financing of terrorism have been repeatedly flagged. Certain other concerns have also been routinely raised, such as:

Concerns by the Central banks

– Cryptocurrencies can render the Monetary policy ineffective and cause massive macroeconomic instability. For more: Read [here](#)

Unsuitable to be used a currency: Their volatility makes them unsuitable as a medium of exchange. It also makes them an erratic unit of account and unreliable as a store of value.

No fundamental value: They are a kind of asset with no fundamental value or source of dividends. The only return comes from other peoples' willingness to hold them that raises their value. This can fall as fast as it rises.

Concerns expressed by SC Garg committee (2019):

- Risks to consumers (*speculative nature, no sovereign guarantee, loss of access if private key is lost, cyber risk*)
- Criminal activity and money laundering
- Anonymity provided to user/holder
- Concerns on supply of currency outside the purview of the central bank, and
- Adverse impact on energy use.

Must Read: [Various concerns regarding Cryptocurrencies](#)

Also, the primary issuance of cryptos (so-called mining) is in the hands of anonymous people within a very opaque structure.

Is a ban on cryptocurrencies a pragmatic policy approach?

Even though there are many genuine concerns regarding Cryptocurrencies, an outright ban would not be the prudent way forward.

A ban will not only be difficult to enforce but may result in draconian currency control measures.

Also, cryptocurrencies issued beyond the reach of India's jurisdiction cannot be extinguished, and outlawing them is likely to disrupt related crypto businesses.

A ban can also drive cryptos into the dark net, increasing their use in criminal activities.

Is a blanket ban possible to implement?

A blanket ban would force crypto exchanges to stop operations in India, but banning cryptocurrencies may be technologically impossible.

While the government can stop the use of the local currency to buy crypto, **there's virtually no way to ban crypto wallets**, which exist online and aren't under the purview of banks and governments.

Peer-to-peer networks are also difficult to police, as people can simply transfer money to each other through bank accounts and transfer the equivalent crypto among each other through wallets.

What has been the global response to Cryptocurrencies?

In September 2021, China imposed a complete ban on crypto transactions.

Countries including **Japan** and **the UK** have created space for their operation.

Canada: It has been one of the early adopters of Crypto. Canada Revenue Authority (CRA) generally treats cryptocurrency like a commodity for purposes of the country's Income Tax Act.

Israel, includes virtual currencies in the definition of financial assets.

Germany categorizes virtual currencies as financial instruments.

United States: While the federal government does not recognize cryptocurrencies as legal tender, definitions issued by the states recognize the decentralized nature of virtual currencies. Although most of these countries do not recognize cryptocurrencies as legal tender, they do recognize the value these digital units represent – as a medium of exchange, unit of account, or a store of value.

What is the general opinion on regulating vs banning cryptocurrencies?

Strong differences of opinion exist even among the policymakers.

Against Cryptocurrencies/In favor of a ban

- **RBI governor, Shaktikanta Das**- He has repeatedly cautioned against cryptocurrencies, arguing that there are serious concerns on macroeconomic and financial stability. The Reserve Bank has, hence, consistently maintained the need to ban private digital currency.
- **SC Garg committee**: In 2019, the government had appointed an inter-ministerial committee headed by the then economic affairs secretary Subhash Chandra Garg which had backed a ban on private cryptocurrencies.
- As per **Usha Thorat** (*former Deputy Governor of RBI*) – Parliament should debate whether there is any public policy objective that can justify allowing private cryptocurrencies even as an exception at this stage. The Indian economy and the people of India cannot afford the play of unproven financial innovations in the country. The utility of Blockchain, as a technology, can be looked at.

In favor of regulation

- An earlier **meeting chaired by the Prime Minister** was in favor of “progressive and forward-looking” steps in the field of cryptocurrency.
- Similarly, members of the **standing committee on finance, chaired by Jayant Sinha**, are reportedly more in favour of regulating, not banning cryptocurrencies.
- The **Supreme Court of India**, in the case of **Internet & Mobile Association of India vs. RBI**, revoked RBI’s ban on virtual currencies. It had observed that in the absence of any legislation, the central bank could not impose disproportionate restrictions on crypto trading. This can be seen as SC’s push authorities towards regulations instead of a ban.
- **Blockchain index fund by SEBI**: Taking a very different stance from RBI, SEBI entered Crypto space by approving **India’s first blockchain index fund**. It was called **Invesco Coinshares Global Blockchain Fund of Fund**. This Exchange Traded Fund (ETF) offered Indian investors exposure to global companies involved in blockchain- related business activities such as cryptocurrency mining, blockchain-based financial services etc. However, the launch was deferred once speculation arose around crypto regulation.
- **As per D. Subbarao** (*former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India*) – One of the approach can be to follow countries such as the UK, Singapore and Japan that have allowed space for cryptos to operate under a regulatory radar but without recognizing them as legal tender. India should follow this middle path.

What is the way forward?

Cryptos need intelligent light-touch regulation. Bans do not work and hurt the exuberant innovation that can throw up valuable products and services.

Firstly, let stablecoins proliferate so that intense market rivalry lets no single token achieve dominance.

Secondly, A digital rupee issued by RBI could be positioned as the real thing for online use. Official backing would lend it a unique advantage. If it’s well crafted, it could exploit the market’s need for a common standard to **attain domestic pre-eminence**. This would help RBI keep in control over monetary policy

Thirdly, Digitisation is the future and it offers many advantages in lower transaction costs, including ease of cross-border transactions. Hence, **Central Bank Digital Currencies** (CBDCs) need to offer these facilities, to prevent a shift of users towards payment services of large global players such as Facebook.

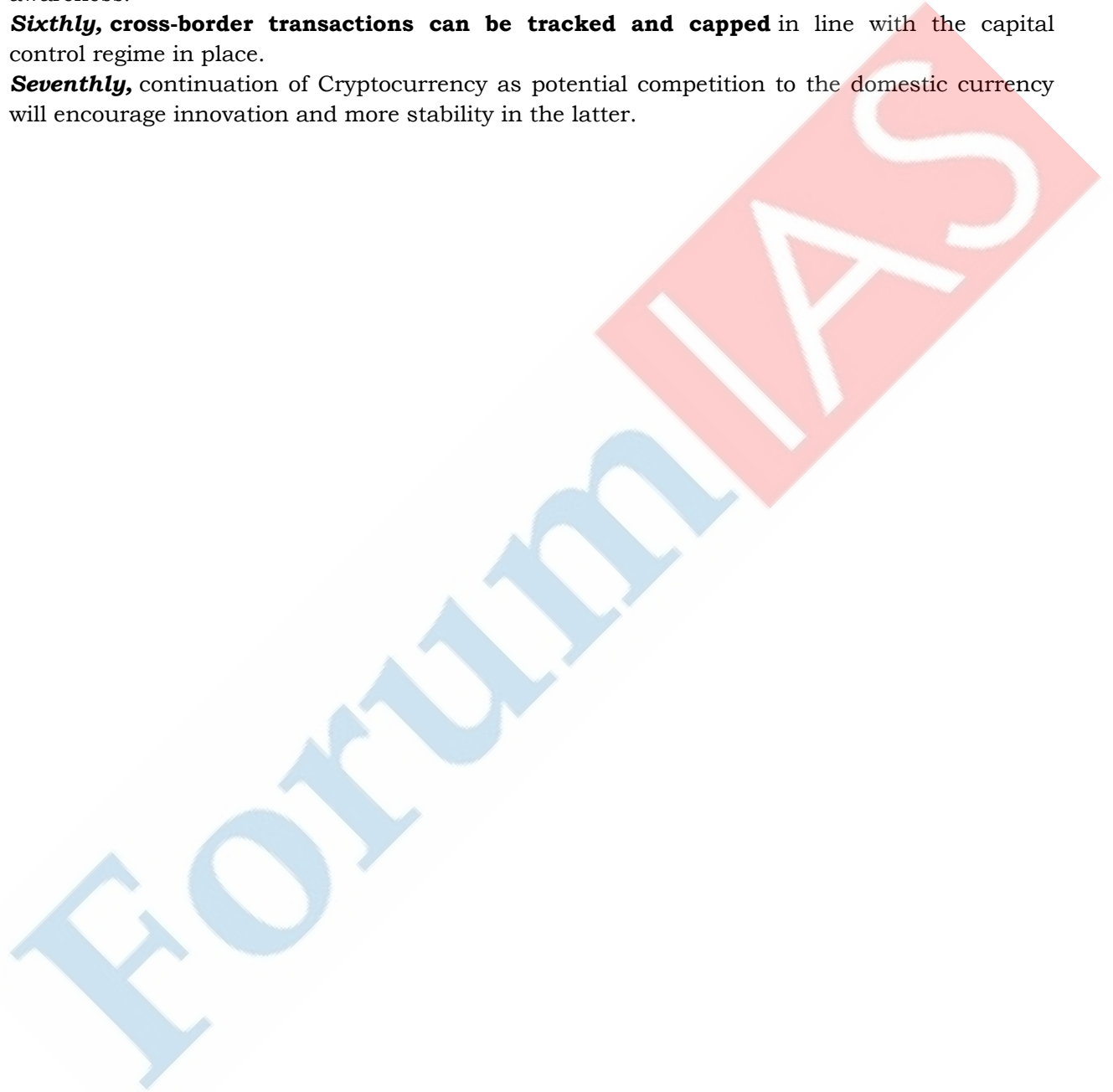
Fourthly, Another possible approach for India is to ban crypto as a medium of exchange, while **regulating it as an asset**. Tech-based regulation can build on the India stack that makes

KYC relatively easy. It can provide investor protection, while taxing capital gains as well as transactions. Macro-prudential regulation could reduce volatility.

Fifthly, exchanges must meet standards of governance, transparency and audit. Advertising must be responsible, highlighting the risks, providing investor education and raising awareness.

Sixthly, cross-border transactions can be tracked and capped in line with the capital control regime in place.

Seventhly, continuation of Cryptocurrency as potential competition to the domestic currency will encourage innovation and more stability in the latter.



NFHS-5 and its findings – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) has released the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) that belongs to phase-2 states along with all-India data. The Survey offers the status of key indicators such as population, reproductive and child health, family welfare, nutrition and others for India.

The findings of NFHS-5 with respect to 22 States & UTs covered in Phase-I were released in December 2020. Phase – II of the Survey covered the remaining 14 States/UTs. The NFHS-5 survey work has been conducted in around 6.1 lakh sample households from 707 districts (as of March 2017) of the country.

About the NFHS Survey

NFHS is released by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)**. But the MOHFW **designated the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai, as the nodal agency**. The IIPS is responsible for providing coordination and technical guidance for the survey.

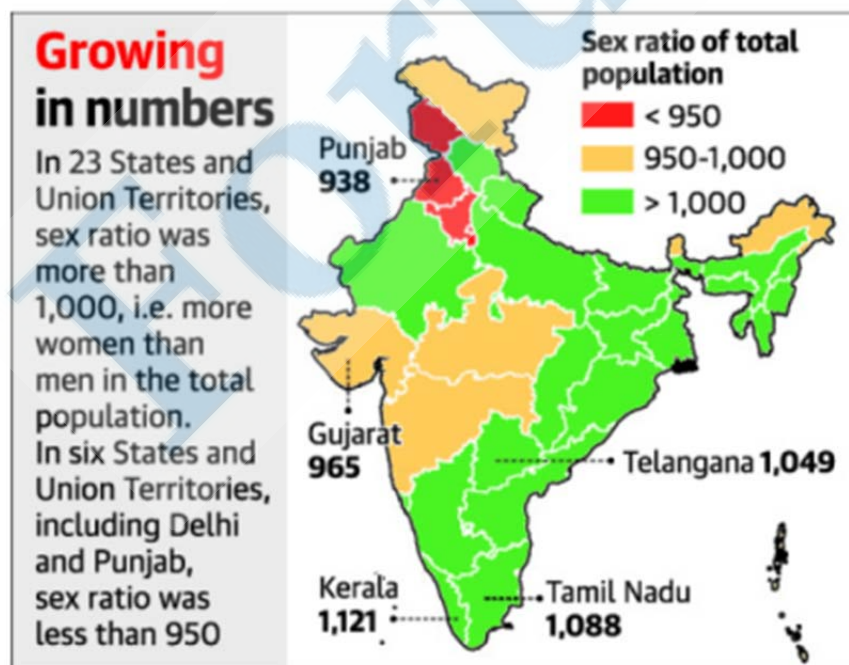
5 rounds of National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) have been conducted so far in India. The first one was conducted in 1992-93. Every National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has **two specific goals** to fulfil. These are

1. To provide essential data needed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and other agencies for informed decision-making and policy and programme intervention purposes.
2. To provide insight regarding important emerging health and family welfare issues.

What is new in the NFHS-5, and what are the findings of Phase I?

Read here: [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\) – 5](#)

What are the key findings of NFHS -5 Phase II at all India level?



Source: The Hindu

Demographic shift in India: For the first time since the NFHS began in 1992, the proportion of women exceeded men. There were 1,020 women for 1,000 men. In the last edition of the survey in 2015-16, there were 991 women for every 1,000 men.

However, sex ratio at birth for children born in the past five years only improved from 919 per 1,000 males in 2015-16 to 929 per 1,000. This underscores that boys, on average, continued to have better odds of survival than girls.

Note: According to Census 2011 findings there are 940 females per 1,000 males.

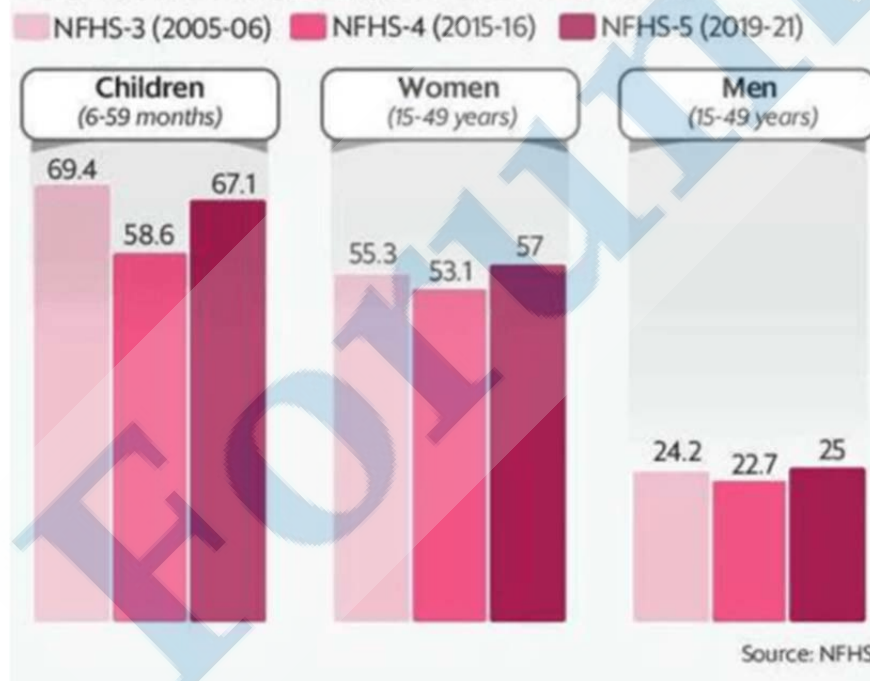
Total Fertility Rates (TFR): Declined from 2.2 to 2.0 at the national level. Only six States — Bihar, Meghalaya, Manipur, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh — have a TFR above two. India is ageing faster than anticipated.

C-section deliveries: C-section births in India increased 4.3 percentage points over five years to 21.5% (NFHS-5) from 17.2% (NFHS-4, 2015-16). Nearly half the total C-section births (49.3%) took place at private health facilities in urban areas. Cesarean births decreased only in Nagaland and Mizoram.

Obesity: India has recorded a four per cent increase in obesity in both men and women in the last five years. No state recorded a decrease in percentage of both men and women who are overweight or obese. Some of the worst-performing states include Haryana, Karnataka, Manipur and Odisha.

Anaemia prevalence has grown across age groups, children are worst hit

Prevalence of anaemia among children and adults (in %)



Source: Livemint

Anaemia: More than half of the children and women (including pregnant women) are anaemic in all the phase-II States/UTs and all-India levels compared to NFHS4. 57% of women of reproductive age in the country are anaemic.

Assam is among the worst-performing states, with a huge spike in anaemic cases.

Must Read: [Union Health Ministry releases NFHS-5 Phase II Findings](#)

What are the significant improvements observed from NFHS-5 Survey?

Population: Achievement of TFR is a significant feat for the [country's family-planning programme](#) and show India has contained the population explosion. But, the onus of family planning still lies with women. This is visible from an increase in female sterilisation and stagnated male sterilisation.

Further, India is still poised to be the most populous country in the world, with the current projection by the United Nations population division forecasting that India's population will peak at 1.6 billion to 1.8 billion from 2040 to 2050.

The NFHS data also shows two key observations. 1. **Urban-rural divide:** with the TFR in the former at 1.6 against 2.1 in rural India, 2. **North-south divide:** Younger and male-dominated society in the north relative to the south and northeast.

Women gaining autonomy: In NFHS 4, 38.4% of women respondents reported owning a house/land alone or jointly, this has risen to 43.3% in NFHS-5.

Further, Women operating bank accounts increased from 53% to 79% between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. Further, 54% of women have mobile phones against 46% earlier, and 77% used hygienic methods during menstruation against 57% earlier.

Bankers and researchers attribute the jump in bank account use to the role of the account opening drive carried out under the PM Jan Dhan Yojana over the last seven years.

Read more: [7 years of PM Jan Dhan Yojana](#)

More accessible hospitals: Rise in institutional delivery signify that secondary healthcare systems – community and district hospitals – are accessible to more people. The data also reveal that most people are choosing private health facilities over public ones.

A much-needed data on lifestyle diseases: Having measured blood sugar and hypertension in the population for the first time, NFHS-5 highlighted the looming threat from lifestyle diseases.

Provide opportunity for states: State-level indices provide comparisons and allow States to launch course correction, or to be inspired by success stories in other regions.

What are the concerns associated with the NFHS-5 report?

Not reliable Demography data: Demography experts say the NFHS figures do not give an accurate picture of India's sex ratio. They believe that the census figures were more reliable than NFHS. This is because:

1. Smaller sample sizes in district when compared to Census, 2. The survey derived sex ratio based on the number of males and females present in the household on the last night of the survey, 3. NFHS counts only certain women, who belong to specific demographic categories, 4. Phase 2 of NFHS 5 happened during the Covid Pandemic, so migrant workers from Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh had returned to their home villages.

Note: *States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh have large and floating population.*

Electoral and economic implications: The north-south divide in terms of younger and older population might have worrying electoral and economic implications. For instance, the 15th Finance Commission used the States' demographic performance as a criterion for devolution.

Women's economic situation hasn't improved a lot: Women who reported working in the past 12 months rose only marginally to 25.4% from 24.6% earlier.

Low performing food security and nutrition schemes: Health insurance coverage has reached merely 41% of households. Further, Rising figures of anaemic women and low

improvement in children nutrition schemes highlights the low performance of the concerned schemes.

No data available for micronutrients: Lack of adequate nutrition is also measured by micronutrient deficiencies, i.e. lack of vitamins and minerals that are essential for body functions and needed for growth and development. While the NHFS does not have data on this.

How India should improve further?

Ramp up social infrastructure: India needs to quickly ramp up social infrastructure, including health, education, and water to reduce Anaemia and improve other services.

Focus on efficiency: Reach and coverage of sanitation related schemes has yielded better outcomes. But failure of the same to other schemes resulted in low performance. So, rather than making serial announcements of grand new schemes, focusing on maximising the efficiency of the ones the government already has should be the priority.

Population control measures: States should tackle the socio-economic issues confronting India rather than seeking neo-Malthusian approaches to population control. Further, India has to counter the deep-rooted son preference through policy and law.

Address the development deficit: The experience of the Southern states shows that declining fertility rates are not just the function of family planning programmes but also have direct links with empowering women. So, the Centre and other states have to work on empowering women.

Improve health services: Both Centre and State governments need to sustain their focus on public health and reduce out-of-pocket expenditure. Further, the pandemic has highlighted the need for building **resilient and fortified systems** capable of delivering in any circumstances.

Promote Indian diet: Indian diets display a rich diversity. Many traditional diets reflect both local climatic conditions as well as a multiplicity of sources of essential nutrients, such as proteins. So the government has to create awareness campaigns to promote Indian diet.

Check unethical practices of private health providers: Nearly half the total C-section births (49.3%) took place at private health facilities in urban areas. These figures are highly unnatural and call into question unethical practices of private health providers who prioritise monetary gain over women's health and control over their bodies.

In conclusion, States need to treat the NFHS as a resource and recognise it as a matrix to work on, to improve the development indicators further. Meanwhile, the Centre must not treat NFHS as a mere stocktaking exercise, but to harness the opportunities for launching reform or re-assessing certain policies without using NFHS as a political tool in a federal set up. So the action plan to improve India's health needs to be inclusive, firm in its commitment and backed by solid resources.

[Yojana October Summary] Digital Local Governance – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

India has set an ambitious target to become a USD 5 trillion economy in the next few years, however, it can only be achieved by transforming our villages into self-sustaining centres of economic development, with a technology-driven Digital Local Governance framework.

Why do Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI's) need Digital Local Governance?

Impact of Pandemic: The pandemic has established the key role of technology and data-driven decision-making. Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI's) have played a pivotal role in responding to the transmission of Covid-19 in rural areas. Hence, it is important to upscale the national efforts towards the adoption of frontier technologies in the government functioning, to the lowest level.

Induce mass technological revolution at a lower level: Being at the interface of rural citizens and governance structure, the panchayats are an effective vehicle to induce mass ICT culture at the local level.

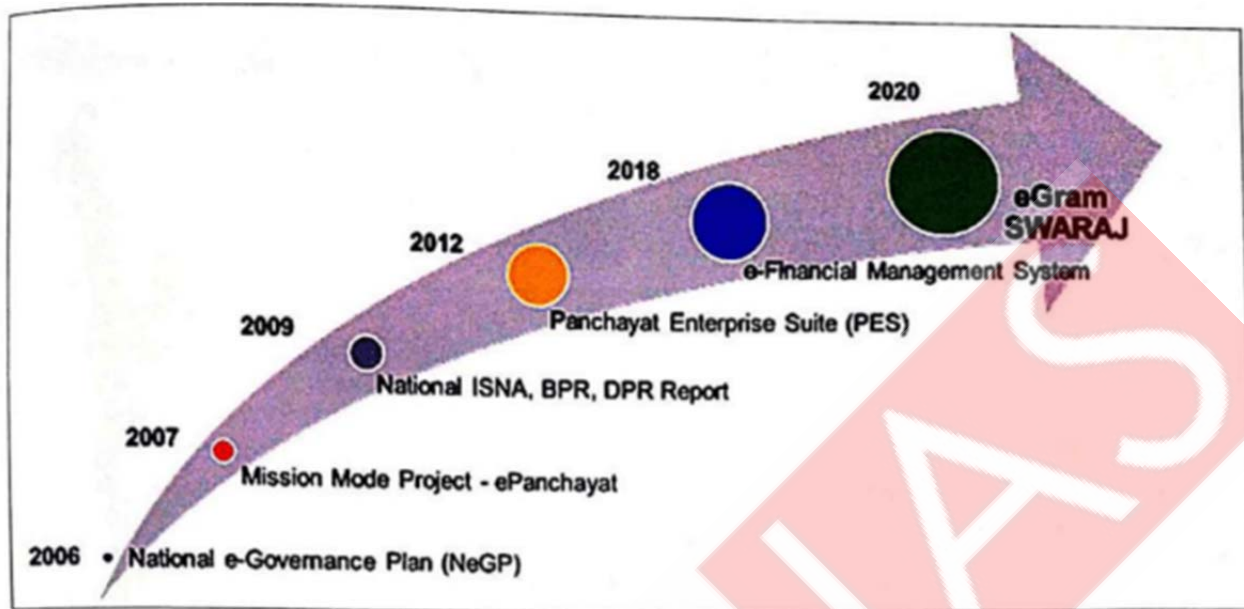
It can build a “**digital inclusive society**” where large sections of the rural population can benefit from new technologies; can access and share information and services freely, and can participate in the development process more effectively.

Collect reliable data at the grassroots level: The Gram Panchayats are uniquely positioned to collect reliable data at the grassroots level and thus, it is essential to leverage the underlying potential of Gram Panchayats. Platforms such as eGramSwaraj can strengthen the data collection and governance architecture in the rural sector.

The evolution of Digital Local Governance in India

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is committed to using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to facilitate Panchayats in effective functioning and empowering the panchayat functionaries to utilise technology in their day-to-day operations.

Over the years, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has collaborated with State Panchayati Raj Departments to improve the governance measures of the Ministry.



Source: Yojana

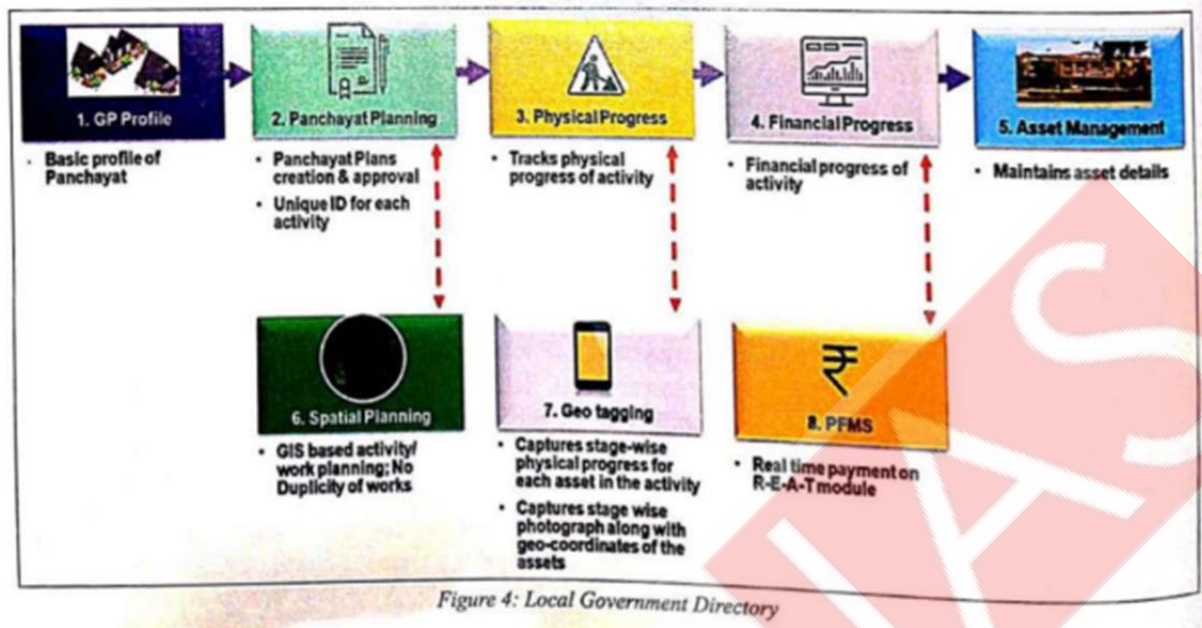
Rise of Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES): In 2009-10, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj commissioned a comprehensive study covering all States and UTs to identify all the Information and Services needs of the stakeholders viz. Central Ministries, State Departments, panchayats, and its citizens.

This led to the identification of **12 Core Common Applications** that addressed all aspects of panchayats' functioning from internal core functions to citizen service delivery. Together, these applications constituted the **Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES)**.

The e-Panchayat suite of applications was launched by the Prime Minister on 24 April 2012. This is celebrated as National Panchayati Raj Day.

Geo-tagging of assets: MoPR has developed **mActionSoft**— a mobile-based solution to help in capturing photos with Geo- Tags (i.e, GPS Coordinates) for the works which have the asset as an output. Geotagging of the assets is done in at least three stages viz. (i) before the start of the work, (ii) during the work, and (iii) on completion of work.

This would provide a repository of information on all works and assets related to natural resource management, water harvesting, drought proofing, sanitation, agriculture, etc.



Source: Yojana

Gram Manchitra (Geospatial planning application): Gram Manchitra was launched in October 2019, as a spatial planning application for facilitating and supporting GPs to perform planning at the GP level with the use of Geo-spatial technology.

The application is being integrated with spatial and non-spatial data from various Ministries. For instance, Banking amenities like Bank branches, ATM, banking correspondence, etc. (Ministry of Finance); Postal Facilities (Ministry of Communication); Schools (Department of School Education & Literacy), etc.

This application is also linked with [Socio-Economic Caste Census \(SECC\)](#) report, Mission Antyodaya (MA) and MA gap analysis, and Resource Envelope allocated to the Gram Panchayat.

eGramSwaraj (eGS, Simplified Work-Based Accounting Software): It is a single platform for all planning and accounting needs of PRIs including various other aspects of Panchayat functioning. This application is developed with an aim for tracking every expenditure incurred for each of the activities proposed under the

[Gram Panchayat Development Plans \(GPDPs\)](#).

The application brings in transparency, accountability, and real-time monitoring of the GPDP. It has been developed by amalgamating the functionalities of currently available applications in the e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP). This application forms the base for the system with the Public Financial Management System (PFMS).

eGramSwaraj-PFMS Interface (eGSPI): It was launched in 2018, for enhancing transparency and accountability, integration of accounting module of eGS and Public Financial Management System was carried out to provide an interface for the panchayats to make online payments, viz. expenditure incurred under Central Finance Commission. eGSPI is a one-of-its-kind interface for GPs to make real-time payments to vendors/service providers.

AuditOnline: It was launched in 2020 subsequent to the recommendation of the [Fifteenth Finance Commission](#). It aims to further strengthen financial management and transparency of Panchayats.

What are the upcoming reforms to improve digital local governance?

Considering the emergence of frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, the Ministry is in the process of bringing several improvements in the eGramSwaraj portal as well as better utilisation of existing platforms such as Gram Manchitra.

Since Gram Panchayats are mandated to plan and execute activities relating to the twenty-nine focus areas listed in the Eleventh Schedule. So, an endeavour is underway to **bring the scheme beneficiaries list** of the eighteen departments. This will further enhance transparency in the Gram Sabha meeting.

The Ministry aims to elevate the eGramSwaraj portal as a comprehensive platform that could not only bring transparency, but it could also bring ease in financial planning and utilisation at the Gram Panchayat level.

Considering the successful integration of the eGramSwaraj with the PFMS platform, the Ministry is exploring the development of an integrated platform with **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)** for the Panchayats, to avail various kinds of services from vendors/service providers to meet the requirement at the grassroots level.

A Chatbot, driven by Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning, for addressing the most common eGramSwaraj issues is also being developed.

In conclusion, The aforesaid interventions are bound to enrich the digital local governance framework of the country and contribute to the technological prowess of the Panchayats and the nation.

Challenges facing Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Recently, four personnel of the 50th Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed by one of their colleagues. According to a study by the United Service Institution of India (USI), more than half of Indian Army personnel seem to be under severe stress. A high level of stress has contributed to the escalation of fratricide (the killing of one's own forces in war) and suicide cases in armed forces.

About the issue of fratricide and Suicides in the armed forces

Fratricide and Suicides among tri-services

A total of 787 armed forces personnel died by suicide from 2014 to March 2021 with the Army reporting a maximum of 591 such cases. During the same period, suicides in the Navy stood at 36 and for the Indian Air Force, it was 160.

During the same period, 18 incidents of fratricide have happened in the Army and two in the Indian Air Force.

Fratricide and suicides among CAPF

As many as 18 deaths due to incidents of fratricide occurred in CRPF alone in the last four years. The most recent one in September this year at Khagrachari post in Gomati district of Tripura which resulted in killing of two personnel of the Border Security Force (BSF).

Further, in 2019, 43 personnel committed suicide, with the figure touching 60 in 2020.

Read more: [New rules to reform financial powers of armed forces](#)

What is the reason behind fratricide and suicides in the armed forces?

The reasons that contribute to the high level of stress are,

A large number of vacancies and associated issues: For instance, the vacancies in CAPFs were nearly a lakh as of January 1, 2019. This can (1). Affect the smooth functioning of the organisations; (2). Create a prolonged exposure of armed forces personnel to Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism (CI/CT) environment; (3). Make it difficult for supervisory officers to send men on leave even twice a year; (4). Defence personnel cannot utilise their own leave. For instance, Defence personnel are entitled to 60 days of annual leave, apart from 30 days casual leave, while CAPF personnel are entitled to only 15 days casual leave, apart from 60 days earned leave.

Read more: [Absence of Regular Chiefs in Central Security Forces](#)

Challenges faced by Lower Rank Officials: They face issues such as excessive workload, domestic problems, non-availability of recreational facilities, lack of dignity in work, and conflict with seniors as well as subordinates, etc.

The personnel are transferred frequently to a new environment: These days, a third of the personnel of a battalion are transferred out. This adversely impacts their bonding with their colleagues. Over a decade ago, the battalions moved as one cohesive unit from one place to another.

The post of one Subedar major (SM) has not been fully used: it is a very important post because the SM keeps the battalion commanders in touch with the pulse of the men on various issues, the most important being the morale of men of the unit.

High stress will also lead to an increased number of incidents of indiscipline, unsatisfactory state of training, inadequate maintenance of equipment and low morale. This in turn affects the efficiency of armed forces.

What steps were taken to address fratricide and suicides in the armed forces?

The **Army** has put in place a **multi-pronged strategy** to address stress among its personnel. The **Indian Air Force** is organising a quarterly '**Mission Zindagi**' campaign to improve the personnel's mental health and stress management through workshops and lectures. The **Indian Navy** has established **Mental Health Centres** in Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Port Blair, Goa and Karwar where family counsellors provide psychological counselling. Apart from that, the **Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR)** is also conducting studies to help the government to work on stress amelioration amongst troops. The **CRPF** has introduced the concept of holding "**chaupals**" where the personnel will be free to air their grievances in informal settings with senior officers.

What are the other steps taken to address the fratricide and suicides in the armed forces?

1. Brainstorming sessions are being held by senior officers; 2. Yoga was introduced in almost all the battalions over a decade back, but it had little effect; 3. Mobile numbers of senior officers are prominently displayed in recreation rooms and messes of the men, allowing them access for airing their grievances directly to senior officers; 4. Personnel are even allowed to seek personal interviews with senior officers to explain their problems and seek redressal.

Read more: [The national security discourse is changing](#)

How to reduce fratricide and Suicides in the armed forces?

According to the United Service Institution of India (USI) report, **Stress prevention and management** should be treated "as a **leadership role** at Unit and Formation level".

Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) has recommended the following steps to decrease stress among armed forces. These are, 1. Rationalizing grant of Leave, 2. Decrease workload and reduce the tenure of deployment, 3. Increase the pay and allowances, 4. Building better interpersonal relations between the officers and men, 5. Training programmes in stress management and 6. Enhancing basic and recreation activities. The government can implement them on an urgent basis.

The Restoration of the system of **posting personnel in a battalion until they attain the rank** of sub-inspectors will instil a sense of belonging and bonding among personnel.

Complete privacy should be ensured when personnel meet their senior officers so that they can come out with their domestic problems candidly.

For CAPF; 1. The post Subedar Major (SM) needs to be activated to avert such incidents; 2. Though the CRPF rules provide for the granting of the honorary posts to exceptionally deserving subedars/SMs, this perhaps has never been implemented. Conferment of such honorary ranks who do not make it to the posts of regular assistant commandants will boost their morale.

In conclusion, Fratricide and Suicides in armed forces have once again highlighted the need to **overhaul the grievance redressal mechanism** in the armed forces. Along with that, the armed services have to be strengthened with enough personnel to relieve them from stress and serve the nation with pride.

India-Turkey relations – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Jawaharlal Nehru had signed the friendship treaty with Turkey in 1951. It underlined India's hopes for building lasting India-Turkey relations. But, India has struggled to develop good relations with Turkey over the decades due to various reasons.

Recently, in the 8th Istanbul summit, the Council of Turkic States has been elevated to "Organisation of Turkic States". With this, Turkey might vigorously promote pan-Turkism along the Eurasian landmass. This is a cause of concern for many countries having relations with Turkey and in the Eurasian region.

What is Pan-Turkism?

The ideology of pan-Turkism dates back to the mid-19th century when campaigns for uniting Turkic people in Russia gained traction. Its geographic scope would eventually become much wider, covering the huge spread of Turkic people from the "Balkans to the Great Wall of China". A defining slogan of pan-Turkism is: "**Where there are Turks, there is Turkey.**"

But, the decline of Turkey and the integration of Turkic people into other states diminished the idea in the 20th century.

About the formation of the Organisation of Turkic States

Read here: [What the rise of pan-Turkism means for India](#)

Why does India need to pay attention to Pan-Turkism?

Consequences in India's Eurasian neighbourhood: The rise of pan-Turkism is bound to have important consequences for Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and the Central Asian regions.

Adds another layer of complexity in Central Asia: The rise of Turkey and the formation of the Organisation of Turkic States adds more complexity to the Eurasian geopolitics. This opens a range of new opportunities for Indian foreign and security policy in Eurasia.

What is the significance of Turkey for India?

The **strategic location of Turkey** to provide connectivity with Central Asia through the Caucasus has many advantages for India.

1. **Increase in Turkey's profile in the region:** Over the past few decades, various initiatives of Turkey have increased Turkey's profile in Central Asia and generated new bonds with other countries in the region.

2. **The military power of Turkey:** Turkey's increasing military power projection is taking the whole world by surprise. In the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan earlier this year, Turkish military intervention decisively tilted the war in favour of the latter. Many in the region are beginning to purchase Turkish drones. So, India can procure weapons from Turkey.

3. **Potential Commerce in the region:** Turkish annual trade with the Central Asian region is around \$10 billion with the potential to grow much larger. By engaging with Turkey, India can also improve its economic presence in the region.

4. Turkey is also building **transportation corridors** to Central Asia and beyond, to China, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The so-called **Lapis Lazuli Corridor** now connects Turkey to Afghanistan via Turkmenistan. By engaging with Turkey, India can get access to these infrastructure corridors.

So India should engage with Turkey to improve India-Turkey relations and also India's relations with other countries in the region

Read more: [“Sea Snot” outbreak in Turkey and its effect on the marine ecosystem](#)

What are the current areas of cooperation in India-Turkey relations?

Both countries are cooperating in the following domains.

1. **Trade:** The major Indian exports to Turkey include medium oils and fuels, man-made filaments and staple fibres, automotive spare parts and organic chemicals. Turkey’s exports include poppy seeds, iron and steel products, machinery and mechanical appliances, inorganic chemicals, pearls and precious stones and metals and marble.
2. Determined to **combat terrorism** in any form and agreed to strengthen cooperation effectively,
3. Agreed on **United Nations reforms** and work towards the **expansion of UN Security Council**.

What are the concerns associated with India-Turkey relations?

Turkey’s stand on Kashmir: Turkey has become the most active international supporter of Pakistan on the Kashmir question. Turkey, while pitching for self-determination in Kashmir; actively tramples on the rights of its Kurdish minority at home and confronts them across Turkey’s border in Syria and Iraq.

Support to Pakistan and Afghanistan: Turkey has closer ties with Pakistan and Afghanistan. This is a real and serious issue for India.

For instance, Pakistan remained close partners in a number of regional organizations and international forums like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Turkey’s departure from Secularism: While India remains a secular country from the beginning, Turkey, on the other hand, departed from secularism and now focuses more on Islamist internationalism. This act as a pulling factor for traditional Islamist nations such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and others in the region.

Read more: [What India must keep in mind when it comes to Turkey](#)

What should India do to improve India-Turkey relations?

Reinforce the sustained dialogue: Dealing with Turkey is now a most significant part of India’s foreign and security policy.

Signing a free trade deal with Turkey: Turkey had shown interest in a free trade pact with India. So, India should sign a free trade pact to boost India-Turkey relations.

Engage in Turkey’s strategic sectors: Turkey is a NATO member, but has also maintained its strategic interests. For instance, 1. Turkey has purchased advanced weapons like **S-400 missiles** from Russia but also has differences of opinion with Russia’s Central Asian backyard, 2. Turkey has the ambitious pursuit of the Islamic world’s leadership, but it is also the first Muslim-majority nation that established full diplomatic relations with Israel.

So, India should understand that Turkey’s economic and strategic relationship with Pakistan will not hamper Turkey’s business ties with India. So, India needs to engage in Turkey’s strategic sectors.

Utilise Turkey as a mediator: Turkey’s good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan have given space for Turkey to present itself as a mediator between the warring South Asian neighbours. India can utilise Turkey’s role.

Read more: [What is CAATSA? Why U.S. imposes CAATSA sanctions on Turkey?](#)

As a great civilisational state, Turkey will endure as a pivotal state in Eurasia. Independent India has been at the forefront of building a large movement of developing countries — or the

“Global South” — against the rich “Global North”. The Pan-Turkism and the Organisation of Turkic States open new possibilities for India and in the Eurasian periphery.

ForumIAS

ASER Survey and issues in school education – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Recently, the 16th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) survey 2021 has been released. Unlike other ASER reports that are focused on learning outcomes, 2020 and 2021 reports are focused on rural school education levels in a post-pandemic world.

It also captures trends during the early phases of partial school reopening. The survey results are important for India, as the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in one of the longest school closures in the world.

About ASER 2021 Survey

The ASER survey is facilitated by Pratham Education Foundation. The survey is known for the range of insights it provides on levels of foundational learning at the elementary level.

The 2021 survey was based on a **household-based telephonic survey** conducted in **rural areas** across 581 districts in 25 states and three Union Territories.

The survey assesses enrolment in schools and tuition classes and access to devices and learning resources rather than the organisation's usual face-to-face survey (*Face to Face survey assesses learning outcomes and children's competencies in reading and arithmetic skills.*)

What are the Key findings of ASER Survey 2021?

Increase in Enrolment in Government Schools: Around 70.3% of children in India enrolled in government schools in 2021. This is up from 65.8% in 2020 and 64.3% in 2018.

Decrease in enrolment in private schools: In 2020, the enrolment rate was 28.8%, which decreased to 24.4% in 2021.

Tuition Dependent: There was a 40% increase in the number of school-going children taking tuition during the closure of their schools amid the pandemic.

Digital Divide: Smartphone penetration in rural India had grown from 36.5% in 2018 to 62% in 2020. 68% of enrolled children had at least one smartphone at home, but their percentage varied sharply between children attending government schools (63.7%) and private ones (79%). In states like Bihar, UP, the lack of access varied from 54 to 34%.

One-third of children in Classes I and II have not yet seen the inside of a physical classroom. State-run schools ran online classes more reliably than private ones in rural areas.

Read more: [Why do we need to reopen schools?](#)

Why there is an increase in government school enrolment?

1. Result of financial distress due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2. The [closure of affordable private schools](#), 3. The movement of migrants and their children to rural areas, 4. State governments concerted efforts to reach out to children with learning materials.

What are the challenges highlighted by the ASER Survey?

Unable to catch up with syllabus after schools reopen: In the reopened schools surveyed, the ASER Report found that the children face hardship in catching up with the syllabus. This is one of the biggest challenges in the school education system.

Vulnerability of most disadvantaged households: The largest increase in children taking tuition was in the most disadvantaged households. This raises the question regarding the efficacy of remote learning and technological solutions to a crisis of access and inequality. So, there is a sign of the persistent demand for good education among vulnerable sections.

Impact on nutritional health: The closure of schools also affected the level of nutrition among the children where the [midday meals](#) have been stopped.

Reduction in school budget: This year, the Centre slashed the education budget by 6%, with school education taking the biggest cut.

Intergenerational learning loss: Junior school kids are found to have [lost elementary skills](#). Educationists fear that the learning loss caused by the pandemic might be inter-generational, with grave consequences for the economy and society.

Benefits were not evenly spread: In homes short of digital devices, students in higher classes typically got usage precedence over the younger lot, so the facility's benefits were not evenly spread.

How to bridge the learning gaps?

Repeat the academic year: One way of addressing the learning crisis might be to repeat the entire academic year. For instance, The government in Kenya has recently decided to do just this. Some countries, such as the Philippines, allow extended time for classes on resumption, both in the duration of school hours and more calendar days of interaction.

Bringing back the dropouts: Whenever schools reopen, the government has to bring back the dropouts. For instance, the Uttar Pradesh government proposes to track all students disappearing between Classes VIII and IX. Similar tracking is necessary at the India level.

Special focus on marginalised sections: Introducing the concept of One-to-one tutoring for the most disadvantaged learners. For example, the National Tutoring Programme of the UK and a similar programme in Ghana were done this. In Italy, university students are volunteering to conduct one-on-one classes for middle school children from poor immigrant backgrounds.

How to improve school education?

1. Invest heavily in public education by increasing budgetary support, **2.** Forestall recovery plan's potential fallout over the next decade and thereafter, **3.** Focus more on the digital infrastructure, especially in the remote areas where more disruptions are visible.

Read more: [Blended model of learning – Explained in detail](#)

S-400 Triumph Missile system – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Deliveries of S-400 Triumph Missile defence system to India have been commenced by Russia. Five of such systems were bought by India from Russia in 2018 for nearly US\$5.5 billion.

The delivery is likely to be completed by April 2023. Both India and Russia have worked out a **Rupee-Rouble** exchange agreement for settlement of payments.

On the other hand, the US govt has expressed its concern over the issue and still remains undecided on how to deal with the situation.

Let us understand the entire issue in detail.

What is the S-400 Triumph missile system?

– S-400 Triumph Missile System (*Named SA-21 Growler by NATO*) is a long range, mobile & surface-to-air missile system (SAM) having an operational range of over 400 km.

– It is considered one of the world’s most advanced air defence systems that can engage all types of aerial targets such as aircraft, ballistic and cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV).

– Can track 100 airborne targets including super fighters such as the American built F-35 and engage six of them simultaneously.

– It is a successor to the S-300 system and entered operational service in 2007. In 2015, it was deployed in Syria by Russia to protect its military assets and has also been deployed in Crimea.

– The system comes equipped with **four types of missiles: i)** Short- range up to 40 km, **ii)** Medium-range up to 120 km, **iii)** Long-range, going as far as 250 km, **iv)** Very-long-range up to 400 km

Due to its highly advanced features and capabilities, the S-400 has emerged as one of the most controversial arms exports of Russia and a major point of contention between Washington and Moscow.

Why India purchased the S-400 missile system?

The S-400 **fills important gaps in India’s national air defence network.**

– It would **complement India’s indigenous Ballistic Missile Defence system** developed by the DRDO and create a **multi-tier air defence** over the country.

– Given its long range, it means that if deployed towards the Western borders, the system **can track movements of Pakistan Air Force** aircraft as soon as they take off from their bases.

– It would **make up for the falling fighter aircraft squadrons** of the Indian Air Force (IAF), in the medium term.

Former IAF chief B.S. Dhanoa had on several occasions termed the S-400 air defence systems and Rafale fighter jets as “game-changers” for the IAF and said they were like a “booster dose” to the force.

The S-400, can constrain the enemy’s air operations even within their own airspace, a capability unmatched by typical Western systems offered up as alternatives.

What are the issues associated with India’s S-400 purchase?

i). US displeasure: U.S. has repeatedly conveyed its displeasure to New Delhi on various occasions, asking India to cancel the purchase and has offered advanced U.S. air defence systems instead. India also faces the prospect of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA. Moreover, the present US administration has not conveyed a clear signal on CAATSA waiver to India.

– **US wants India to reduce its traditional reliance on Russian defence systems.** Russia has been the largest defence partner for India over the decades. This relationship is changing as India inches closer to the US diplomatically and strategically. Imports from the US have gone up, largely at the cost of Russian imports.

ii). Balancing US and Russia: India has a series of high-tech deals lined up with both Russia and the USA. Hence, New Delhi will be facing tremendous pressure while balancing the two. Some upcoming deals:

– **Russia:** Ka-226T utility helicopters, AK-203 assault rifles and Igla-S Very Short Range Air Defence (VSHORAD) systems.

– **USA:** Additional P-8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft, AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, armed drones and Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) aircraft.

iii). Increasing dependence and use of Russian equipment might become a concern owing to the **interoperability problems** vis-à-vis US military systems.

iv). Another concern is of **US and Russian weapon systems operating in proximity**, since India has both. Secrets may be compromised because of hacking and stealing.

Can India face sanctions under CAATSA?

CAATSA empowers the US President to impose sanctions on persons who engage in a **“significant transaction”** with American adversaries, including Russian defence and intelligence sectors. US has cautioned that the delivery of the five S-400 systems is a **significant transaction** under the **CAATSA ([Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act](#)) of 2017** which can trigger sanctions against Indian officials & the Government.

The US imposed sanctions on Turkey, a longstanding NATO ally, in December 2020 over its purchase of the system.

– In January 2021, a US Congressional report **warned** that if India goes ahead with the purchase of the S-400 system, it may lead to sanctions.

– In February 2021, US openly declared that a blanket waiver was not a possibility for India.

– In October 2021, two US senators wrote to President Joe Biden, urging for a CAATSA waiver to India.

Sanctioning India will erode the bilateral relationship of India and US at a time when Washington needs New Delhi in its larger objective of containing China. This is especially relevant since India is the only QUAD member which shares a border with China.

Therefore, imposing sanctions on India is not in American interest taking into account the current geopolitical situation.

Hence, it is likely that India may be sanctioned under CAATSA, but the sanctions will largely be **symbolic with little long-term implications.**

What is the way forward?

India’s consistent stand has been that the process for acquisition of the system began prior to CAATSA being introduced in 2017 by the Trump administration. It was in 2016 that India and Russia had signed an agreement on the Triumf interceptor-based missile system.

Moreover, penalising India for serving a part of its military modernisation needs through Russia would put at risk ongoing and potential India-US defence business worth several billion dollars. While India has begun a gradual process of diversifying its arms imports, this process

can only take place incrementally All eyes would now be set on India's upcoming 2+2 dialogue with the USA.

Finding a mutually acceptable solution to the S-400 conundrum will be a major point on the agenda.

