

9pm
Compilation

December 2021, (Fourth Week)

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

General Studies - 1

1. Explained: Personal laws in marriage
2. India urgently requires resilient and empowered cities

General Studies - 2

1. Testing the red lines in the Iran nuclear talks
2. Bangladesh – Model or Miracle?
3. The realm of ideas must always be free and fair
4. Age and marriage: On raising the age of marriage for women
5. Reading sex ratio trends in NFHS-5 data
6. Health will remain high on agenda
7. On India's Data Policy – The promise and peril of big data in India's policy space
8. Why WHO's Pandemic treaty is a smokescreen
9. Courting the stans: India's outreach to central Asia is vital to counter the China-Pakistan axis
10. Exam-conducting bodies must support candidates with disabilities
11. Summit for Democracy: What constitutes democracy is for actual democracy to define
12. Fiscal Federalism: The sustained attack on federalism
13. Raising marriage age won't lead to women's empowerment
14. Why the Russia-West equation matters to India
15. Why raising marriage age of women won't achieve its stated goal
16. How the Code on Wages 'legalises' bonded labour
17. India is keeping an eye on Central Asia
18. Ladakh: A deeply insecure Union Territory
19. A delicate but necessary mission to Mynamar
20. Looking beyond the Forest Rights Act
21. On Geopolitics of India – As a regional leader, not a victim of circumstance
22. The troubling courtroom policymaking by the supreme court
23. Common electoral roll: Electoral reform is welcome, but shouldn't be selective
24. e-shram registration is a stepping stone towards protection of informal workers
25. On Omicron: Before the third wave
26. Needed, a public health architecture for India
27. This clean cooking fuel plan needs more firing up
28. So, no one killed news television ratings: Ring a bell?
29. On Sports Culture – Every sportsperson is a champion
30. India cannot take a black and white approach to Myanmar

General Studies - 3

1. Neither ban nor regulate crypto
2. Interpretation of ARC maladies
3. The overlooked case for food losses and waste
4. MSP for all crops is fiscally unfeasible
5. Data Protection Bill: National security, at the cost of citizens' privacy
6. Insurgencies are defeated by democratic politics, not force
7. How to get PLIs transform manufacturing
8. Focus on local bodies in govt push to improve ease of doing business

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

9. Can India become a technology leader?
10. How does the Fed's taper move impact Indian economy?
11. Why bugs should be a bigger part of the human food chain
12. India's FTA ambitions in perspective
13. What rising inequality means
14. An over-engineered social stock exchange?
15. Blue sky thinking-Net zero aviation is more than a flight of fantasy
16. Gati Shakti: A much-needed fast track to development
17. Delink the good, bad and ugly of online gaming for apt regulation
18. A fair playing field for ARCs to rival our new bad bank
19. On Plastic pollution
20. Our Harmed Forces?
21. The data protection bills' reduced emphasis on privacy
22. Our semiconductor shortage is likely to persist for a long while
23. Will India Pay For RBI's Hurry?
24. On PSB privatisation: Avoidable delay
25. On WTO Ruling against Indian Sugar industry – Lasting solution
26. Sleepwalking into Chinese control of critical tech
27. Turmoil on the high seas-Indian shippers need stability assurers
28. The spirit of disinvestment

General Studies Paper - 1

General Studies - 1

1. Explained: Personal laws in marriage

Source: This post is based on the article “**Explained: Personal laws in marriage**” published in **The Indian Express** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS1 – Issues related to women

Relevance: Amendment in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

News: A Bill proposing to **increase the age of marriage** for women, and **ensuring harmony in the age limit across religions**, was introduced in Lok Sabha this week and then referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

Both aspects of the proposed amendment to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 have raised a debate on female autonomy and the application of personal laws in marriage.

Must Read: [Raising the legal age of marriage for women – Explained, pointwise](#)

What does the amendment propose?

It proposes three things:

– **Increase in the minimum age of marriage for a woman.** By amending the definition of a “child” in Section 2(a) to mean “a male or a female who has not completed twenty-one years of age”, the Bill makes the minimum age of marriage same for both men and women.

– **Increase in the window for a “child” to file a petition to declare a child marriage void.** Under Section 3(3) of the Prohibition of child Marriage Act, 2006 both the boy and the girl have the right to opt out of marriage until two years after attaining majority, i.e. up to the age of 20 years for a girl and 23 years for the boy.

The Bill proposes to **extend this window for both the woman and the man to five years** after attaining majority. Since the age of majority is 18 for both, this would mean that either the man or the woman can file a petition to declare the child marriage void before they turn 23, or until two years after reaching the new minimum age of marriage.

– **Introduction of a “notwithstanding” clause.** This essentially calls for equal application of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act across religions, notwithstanding any customs.

What are the issues/concerns with the amendment?

– Since the age of majority is 18, increasing the age of marriage is viewed as a **paternalistic approach by the state** in personal matters of an individual.

– Additionally, the application of the child marriage law across faiths sets the stage for a debate on the **limits of personal law**.

– One of the views is that the bill may also be **violative of Article 25 of the Constitution**, which guarantees the freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.

– Another criticism is that increasing the minimum age of marriage **will further push many marriages to illegality and marginalise vulnerable sections**. Since the existing Act does not make child marriage automatically illegal, the increase in minimum age might not really benefit women.

– Also, since Muslim law recognises “attaining puberty”, which is legally assumed at 15 years, as the minimum age of marriage, it raises **questions as to whether the child marriage law can apply to Muslims**.

Can secular law override personal law?

Courts have offered different interpretations:

Views of the Supreme Court

- In *Shayara Bano v Union of India (2017)*, the Supreme Court declared the practice of instant triple talaq as unconstitutional although it is provided for under Muslim law.
- In a 1960 case, the Supreme Court held that the Transfer of Property Act, 1882 would apply over Muslim law on transfer of property.

Views of the High Court:

The **Karnataka High Court**, in the case of *Seema Begaum D/O Khasimsab vs State Of Karnataka (2013)* – *no Indian citizen on the ground of his belonging to a particular religion, can claim immunity from the application of the P.C.M.*

In February 2021, the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted protection to a Muslim couple (*a 17-year-old girl married to a 36-year-old man*), holding that theirs was a legal marriage under personal law. The HC examined provisions of the PCM Act but held that since the special law does not override personal laws, **Muslim law will prevail.**

2. India urgently requires resilient and empowered cities

Source: This post is based on the article “**India urgently requires resilient and empowered cities**” published in **Live mint** on **24th Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 1 – Issues related to urbanization

Relevance: Sustainable cities

News: Equitable and sustainable cities are the only solutions to balance the need for economic growth with the needs of people and the environment.

Cities across the world contribute about 80% of global gross domestic product. They are drivers of growth and dense labor marketplaces. However, recent developments have highlighted the severe economic, humanitarian, and ecological impacts of unbalanced urbanization in India.

What are the impacts of unbalanced urbanization in India?

Firstly, unbalanced development has made cities more vulnerable to environmental shocks that get more frequent and intense.

A World Resources Institute India report notes temperature rise and flooding as two key risks to Mumbai.

Mumbai’s municipal commissioner has highlighted the possibility of 70-80% submergence of key parts of the city by 2050.

Secondly, lack of adequate health infrastructure. It resulted in the mass movement of laborers towards their homes during the Pandemic. This mass movement of labor paralyzed industrial units, apart from civic and other services in cities.

So, building equitable and sustainable cities is the solution. However, there are certain problems with it.

What are the challenges in building equitable and sustainable cities?

Firstly, the reactive approach to development rather than the proactive approach often results in short-term gains that don’t keep pace with the city’s changing face.

Secondly, the issue of disaggregated management of cities. For instance, there are many different departments running a city, both from a planning perspective and for the provision of government services. This hampers the way city infrastructure and land usage get rolled out and increases the challenges for citizens in their interactions with the city administration.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

What is the consequence?

A combination of the above results in large informality in how people live.

Lack of quality housing: Around 50% of a city's population occupies 10% of the land and according to government data for 2016-17, 26-37 million families in urban India reside in informal housing. These areas are also more susceptible to natural disasters and crises

Poor access to state services: like water, sanitation, and health.

How implementing the 74th amendment act in letter and spirit can solve the issue?

It envisaged city planning, land-use regulation, and city services to be managed by local governments in a holistic way.

Most importantly, it set out the basis for local empowered governments and active citizen participation. However, its roll-out is still slow in most cities.

What needs to be done to truly empower our city governments?

According to Praja's Urban Governance Index, an empowered city government is the first step towards building equitable and sustainable cities. It can be done by focusing on the following areas,

Empowered city-elected representatives: by investing in building capacity of the elected representatives. Municipal councilors are critical in this journey, given their structured participation in city processes and a better understanding of available resources and citizen needs.

Empowered city administration: Technology should be used to enable a data-based dialogue between local governments and the citizenry. It can be turned into a city data hub that is easily accessible to citizens and municipal employees for grievance redressal, or for sharing information on government services

Empowered citizens: citizens' understanding of a city's working and their ability to be a part of local governance needs to be enhanced. For example, Organizations like Mahila Housing Trust are attempting to innovatively do this at scale in places like Delhi and Gujarat.

General Studies Paper - 2

General Studies - 2

1. Testing the red lines in the Iran nuclear talks

Source: This post is based on the article “Testing the red lines in the Iran nuclear talks” published in **The Hindu** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – India and its Neighborhood- Relations.

Relevance: The negotiations for a renewed Iran nuclear deal

News: Multilateral nuclear talks have started once again in Vienna with a new Iranian negotiating team. For the time being, the talks seem to have no positive outcomes. Both US and Iran are completely rigid and want the other party to back down and make concessions before they will move.

Hence, it's unclear whether the negotiations in Vienna would be able to deliver substantive results.

Must Read: [Tehran's white flag in Vienna](#)

What are the reasons behind the current deadlock b/w US & Iran?

Due to the following factors:

Firstly, Iran is playing the **North Korean card**, and is moving towards leaving the economic sphere of the United States and Europe and joining China and Russia.

Secondly, the US does not have a very clear direction for Iran's future. This is because the U.S. President is refusing to commit to lift sanctions on Iran during the remaining years of his presidency.

What is the stand taken by various stakeholders?

Iran insists on all sanctions being lifted. Its negotiators have talked of the fundamental injustice committed by the U.S., an injustice in which the Europeans have been complicit.

– Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's demands have consistently centered on full sanctions removal.

– The newly elected government headed by Ebrahim Raisi is trying to leverage Iran's expanding nuclear programme to get more concessions from the international community, without paying significant costs. As a result, there is an **increasing pessimism** on whether the Iran nuclear deal can be revived.

The USA is asking Iran to **return to reduced enrichment** of uranium and accept full International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections.

The U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has warned Iran that “*the hour is getting very late*” to return to the nuclear deal. However, he also added that “*it is not too late for Iran to reverse course to save the deal aimed at curbing Tehran's nuclear capabilities, in exchange for an easing of sanctions from Washington*”.

Europe till now has been almost non-existent in these new talks. It is trying to close the deal as quickly as possible, as Iran ramps up uranium enrichment. But at the same time, it doesn't seem to be a **forceful mediator** in these talks, given that there are the Chinese and the Russians, who are in favour of the Iranians.

China: It has made comments regarding “**nuclear hypocrisy**” of the West, indicating that it is sympathetic to the fundamental arguments of the Iranian negotiators.

Israel: Israeli officials have been pressing European governments and the U.S. on a **real Iranian nuclear threat**. It continues to see the Islamic Republic of Iran as an **existential**

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

threat. From the Israeli point of view, this threat can be justified by Iran's current **hegemonic military drive** into the Levant region.

Levant = *Historically, the region along the eastern Mediterranean shores, roughly corresponding to modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and certain adjacent areas*

2. Bangladesh – Model or Miracle?

Source: This post is based on the article “**Bangladesh- Model or Miracle**” published in **Business standard** on **19th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2- India and its Neighborhood

Relevance: Learning for India from the developmental model of Bangladesh.

News: Bangladesh got Independence in 1971. The then war-torn country referred to by many as basket-case, is now a developmental model for growth and human development.

A basket-case is a country or organization that is in severe financial or economic difficulties, one that is unable to pay its debts.

In which areas, Bangladesh is doing better than India?

Bangladesh has a **female labour force participation rate of 36% while India's is at 21%** (*Pre-Taliban Afghanistan had a higher ratio of women to men working than India*).

For a detailed comparison of India -Bangladesh on socio-economic growth indicators, click [here](#).

Must Read: [India-Bangladesh relations](#) | [Recent developments in India-Ban relations](#) | [Making of Shonar Bangla](#)

What are the probable reasons for Bangladesh's growth and development?

Unitary government, without competition between federal and provincial governments.

Outward orientation: An Openness to trade and investment which fuelled garment sector growth in the country.

Policy continuity: Bangladesh has better macroeconomic indicators than India. Before Pandemic, India's general government deficit was about twice Bangladesh's.

Currently, also, its debt-to-GDP ratio is just 38% while that of India's is 90%.

Involvement of NGOs and civil society: The areas where the government couldn't provide the required services, were covered by active involvement of Civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This led to inclusion and development.

Most of these factors have not been an explicit outcome of Bangladesh's developmental policy but mere realities that the Nation came into existence with. However, India can still learn how Bangladesh has put to use its strengths and weaknesses to carve a niche development story of its own.

Must Read: [Lessons from Bangladesh's growth story](#)

3. The realm of ideas must always be free and fair

Source: This post is based on the article “**The realm of ideas must always be free and fair**” published in the **Livemint** on **20th December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 2 Fundamental Rights.

Relevance: Understanding the concerns associated with freedom of religion.

News: US Congress recently approved a bill to ban imports from Xinjiang that might be the result of forced labor.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Must read: [U.S. imposes sanctions against China over abuse of Uighurs](#)

Why was the reason behind the USA move?

The new world order after World War 2 was based on liberal ideas like freedom of thought, which also included freedom of religion. According to the US, China's treatment of Uyghurs is a violation of that order.

Why religious conversions should be checked?

The religious conversion itself is controversial. "Vocational education and training centres" for Uyghurs in China seems to imprison and indoctrinate Uyghurs with Communist Party ideology—in effect, convert them.

Thus, any form of state incentive which favours a particular religion should be seen thoroughly investigated.

Also read: [People are Free to Choose Religion: Supreme Court](#)

How religion is used in politics in India?

Polls in UP have raised **us-versus-them** debate. The agitation has lost traction. The appeals to Hindu revivalism are neither uniform and at times may induce harm to people or minorities. For many weeks in Gurugram people have been denied Muslims space to offer prayers in public. This does not reflect the nation's stand, but it does impact the sentiments of people.

What should be done to ensure religious freedom?

In India, Judiciary should evaluate the faith-based exclusion of citizenship enacted through the [citizenship amendment act 2019](#).

Last February, the Supreme Court said it would lay down the ambit of religious freedom under the Constitution's **Article 25**. This is a welcome move.

Article 25: says "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion subject to public order, morality and health."

4. Age and marriage: On raising the age of marriage for women

Source: This post is based on the following articles:

"Age and marriage: On raising the age of marriage for women" published in **The Hindu** on 20th December 2021.

"Beyond the age barrier" published in **Business Standard** on 20th December 2021.

Syllabus: GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance: To understand the challenges in raising the legal age for marriage.

News: Recently, the Union Cabinet has passed a proposal raising the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years — the same as men. The government has taken this decision based on the recommendations of the Committee headed by Jaya Jaitly.

Must read: [Raising the legal age of marriage for women – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the recommendations of the Jaya Jaitly committee?

Read here: [Recommendations given by the Jaya Jaitly committee](#)

What are the arguments against raising the legal age of marriage for women?

Young women are **not yet financially independent**: They are reeling under familial and societal pressures. So, young women are unable to exercise their rights and freedoms.

Issues with Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006: 1. Women's rights activists point out that parents often use this Act to punish their daughters who marry against their wishes or elope to evade forced marriages, domestic abuse, and lack of education facilities. So, the age limit will increase parents' authority over young adults, 2. Child marriage remains a recurring issue despite being outlawed, So the law is impossible to monitor.

Might create a communal flashpoint: The personal laws such as Hindu and Christian personal law, Muslim personal law has to be amended. This might create a communal flashpoint.

Read more: [Population control measures in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What needs to be done to increase the legal age for marriage?

Laws cannot be a shortcut in the path to social reform. A good way to achieve the stated objective is to take steps to counsel girls on early pregnancies and provide them with the network to improve their health.

The focus must be on creating social awareness about women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and ensuring girls are not forced to drop out of school or college.

5. Reading sex ratio trends in NFHS-5 data

Source: This post is based on the article **“Reading sex ratio trends in NFHS-5 data”** published in **Indian Express** on **20th December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 2 Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance: To understand the recent findings of NFHS 5.

News: The NFHS data is a well-structured and unique one. Further, the findings of NFHS and the Census figure are no means comparable.

Must read: [NFHS-5 and its findings – Explained, pointwise](#)

About the NFHS

Read here: [What is National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\)?](#)

What do the NFHS findings signify on the sex ratio?

NFHS-5 results indicate an improvement over the last four years from 991 women in 2015-16 to 1,020 women in 2019-21 for every 1,000 men. This data is significant because,

-The NFHS is the world's largest household survey, (over 6,36,699 households), hence it has better reliability than any other national survey.

-The data has to be compared to similar surveys. For instance, Nationally representative household surveys like the second round of the Indian Human Development Survey (IHDS) shows a similar trend — 1,004 women for 1,000 men in 2011-12, an improvement over the first round.

-Though the NFHS data may not be a sole indicator of gender balance, there can be no denying the fact that the gender divide in many areas has narrowed.

-The progress in sex ratio as evidenced by the comparison between the last and the latest round of NFHS clearly conveys the improving sex ratio situation in the country.

Though it is premature to confirm a balanced sex ratio in India, the NFHS results do indicate progress towards that end.

Read more: [The nine lives of India's National Family Health Survey](#)

6. Health will remain high on agenda

Source: This post is based on the article “**Health will remain high on agenda**” published in **Livemint** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Relevance: Health Infrastructure in India.

News: Both the first and second waves of COVID have shown that India needs to strengthen its inadequately resourced health system.

The new year calls for a renewed resolve to build an efficient, equitable and empathetic health system.

What has been done since the onset of the pandemic to strengthen the health infrastructure in India?

Emergency steps by government during the first wave

Fifteenth Finance Commission's special attention to health infra and workforce

2021 budget provisions

Growth in domestic capacity for development, testing and manufacturing of vaccines in 2021

Digital Health Mission and Health Infrastructure Mission under the umbrella of Ayushman Bharat have been initiated that aim to strengthen rural and urban primary healthcare.

– Read more about the mission [here](#)

What is the significance of these initiatives?

These would advance **tele-health in diagnostics and treatment**.

Accurate data can be gathered which can then put to use in emergencies like COVID pandemic and for future **evidence-based policymaking**.

Robust Infra and digitisation will make health system **more efficient, with improved supply chain management of drugs, vaccines and equipment**, while streamlining health insurance programmes.

Good infrastructure and deployment of technology-enabled health workers will **add strength to primary care** in a relatively short time.

How can India cope with the new variant Omicron?

India needs to protect people, especially the vulnerable groups, against severe disease by speedily completing the **double vaccination schedule**.

Homecare will be the main support for the mostly mild cases, while **oxygen equipped beds** will be needed by a small fraction.

Read [here](#)

How India will assume a greater role wrt vaccine development in 2022?

India's role as a global supplier of vaccines will be amplified in 2022, due to the following factors:

– need for **boosters vaccines**

– **development and manufacture of new vaccines**, which can counter variants and provide mucosal immunity

– **Approval of new antiviral pills** will generate high demand for pre-hospital use, with Indian firms called upon to produce large quantities at low cost.

7. On India's Data Policy – The promise and peril of big data in India's policy space

Source: This post is based on the article “**The promise and peril of big data in India's policy space**” published in **Livemint** on **21st Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 2- Issues related to Data Governance in India

Relevance: Need of effective open data policy.

News: Even years after India initiated an ‘open data’ policy, openness, of public datasets, is still very rare. Unlike in the West, the statistical ecosystem in India is not such that administrative datasets can be scrutinized by independent researchers and then deployed for policymaking.

What are the issues/ challenges in using administrative data for policymaking?

Firstly, the issue of the opaqueness of government departments on data.

Three years before, the ‘long walk home’ of migrant workers during the pandemic, a study in India's pre-budget Economic Survey, claimed that the actual number of migrant workers may be roughly double that of census estimates. This study was based on a dataset of unreserved passenger traffic between every pair of railway stations in India.

Thus, the study argued that social security benefits should be portable across states to provide protection to such workers.

However, prominent academics raised questions about the study, arguing that its estimates could not be taken seriously.

If the government had released the raw data behind this study, researchers could have verified the calculations of the study. It would have resulted in attention towards interstate migrants even before the pandemic.

Even our Census can easily miss out on short-term and circular migration flows. Because it is conducted only once in ten years.

Secondly, lack of respect for basic data norms. For instance, during the EPFO data-mining exercise, lack of respect for basic data norms has made it unusable.

The **Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** maintains the digitized records of employees receiving provident fund benefits in this country. This data is a valuable resource to track the movement of people in and out of formal jobs across different sectors.

To obtain valuable information from this EPFO data, the Niti Aayog invited two economists. However, this was against the basic data norms.

In most mature democracies, a public agency would either have published the entire dataset for everyone to use or have invited researchers through a transparent process to mine the dataset for research.

The issue got strengthened when the ‘selected’ researchers suppressed the issue of the **incompleteness of EPFO records**, in their published version of the study.

As a result, the findings from EPFO data and data itself became questionable in the eyes of serious researchers.

Thirdly, the issue of using unverified administrative data sets without public scrutiny.

For instance, the [untested MCA-21 data](#), was used to calculate India's gross domestic product (GDP) 2014-15, despite being warned by an independent expert. This created a big controversy.

If the government had opened up the MCA-21 dataset, suspicions could have been avoided in the early stages.

What are the reasons for the occurrence of such issues?

India's data facilitator [National Statistical Commission](#) (NSC) is severely under-equipped to perform such a role. It also lacks statutory backing, and independent funding has disenfranchised the National Statistical Commission.

What is the way forward?

An **empowered statistical regulator** should be set up in place of NSC. It would make sure that clear norms for data sharing and accessibility are in force.

Many of India's big administrative datasets are flawed. Simply **opening up these databases for public scrutiny** will ensure that errors and inconsistencies are quickly identified. Transparency will lead to accuracy and raise public confidence.

8. Why WHO's Pandemic treaty is a smokescreen

Source: This post is based on the article "**Why WHO's Pandemic treaty is a smokescreen**" published in Times of India on **21st Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: WHO, TRIPS waiver for COVID vaccines and other treatment.

News: A Special session of the World Health Assembly was held recently to negotiate the pandemic treaty. The proposal for a new pandemic treaty is mainly championed by the European Union.

Read more about this treaty [here](#).

What is the current mechanism to deal with any International health emergencies?

Currently, Global public health responses are guided by International Health Regulations (IHR).

IHR was adopted in 1969 and revised in 2005 following the SARS outbreak, there has been recognition of the fact that it needs further revision and that's why this new treaty is being negotiated.

Why this treaty is not a sufficient step to fight present or future pandemics?

Treaty only provides recommendations for tackling a particular issue while ignoring that the countries specially in the south require resources and capacities to reach the public health targets.

There is **no focus on bridging these deficiencies or capacity inequities**. That rich countries have given out far more booster shots in four months than poor countries have given out doses all year, reflects this capacity inequity b/w global North and the South.

Any global effort must ensure distributed capacities so that countries and regions in the south have sovereignty over essential medicines, materials, manufacturing and supply chains.

How has the North responded to this capacity inequity?

There is clear **lack of political will** on the part of developed countries to share essential technology and manufacturing know-how and waive intellectual property barriers. An example of this is that **WHO** mRNA vaccine tech transfer hub in South Africa has been stunted by the refusal of the US and Germany

They have been **unable to convince their corporations** to share public funded technology and IP with this initiative.

What is a TRIPS waiver and how will it help to counter this inequity?

Read about TRIPS [here](#).

Rich countries support the free market ideology but have been largely restricting the TRIPS waiver.

What India can do to advance the cause for TRIPS waiver?

India can show leadership by sharing its technical know-how and manufacturing capacities. It must also resolve inconsistencies that exist in its policy positions between various ministries, while also simultaneously supporting the TRIPS waiver.

What is the way forward?

Public health interests should be placed before corporate interests. There is need for consistent efforts to address deficiencies in global solidarity and improve access to essential lifesaving technologies.

9. Courting the stans: India's outreach to central Asia is vital to counter the China-Pakistan axis

Source: This post is based on the following articles:

“Meeting between India and Central Asian Republics underscores shared concerns on Afghanistan” published in the **Indian Express** on **21st December 2021**.

“Courting the stans: India's outreach to central Asia is vital to counter the China-Pakistan axis” published in the **Times of India** on **21st December 2021**.

“A strategic bulwark: On third India-Central Asia Dialogue” published in **The Hindu** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: Understanding importance of good Central Asia- India relations

News: Recently, a third India- Central Asia dialogue has been held. [Regional Security Dialogue](#) with his Central Asian Republic (CAR) counterparts was also held recently to discuss Afghanistan.

What were the key highlights of the 3rd India- Central Asia dialogue?

Improving connectivity: Discussions have been held on India's \$1 billion Line of Credit for projects in Central Asia. Further, India's connectivity initiatives are based on principles of transparency and respect for sovereignty. The formulation is used by India to oppose China's opaque Belt and Road projects that have already seen countries fall into debt traps and sign away strategic assets.

Read here: [India-Central Asia Dialogue: Six nations call for 'immediate' aid for Afghans](#)

How does instability in Afghanistan impacts CAR?

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share land borders with Afghanistan, so instability directly affects these regions. Ethnic Tajik, Turk and Uzbek are significant minorities in Afghanistan and are the first to be impacted by the Taliban's exclusionary ideology. Also, CARs fears the increase in rising of radical Islam, terrorism and drugs into their own territories.

Read here: [What are Central Asian initiatives to resolve the Afghan crisis?](#)

Why does the Central Asian Republics are important for India?

CAR has massive natural resources like gas, uranium, etc. This can fuel India's next phase of industrialization. Also, linking Iran's Chabahar port with the International North-South Transport Corridor can give India direct access to Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.

Read here: [India quest for a road to Central Asia](#)

What are the roadblocks in prospering India- Central Asian Republics (CAR) relations?

- Russian continues to influence in CAR region and their government.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative and \$100 billion trade have made it a central figure in the region.
- The U.S. has also been seeking a foothold in the region, especially after Afghanistan.
- India's land connectivity to Central Asia is hampered by Pakistan. The alternative route, via Iran's Chabahar, has also received a setback after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. The development of the Indian-managed Shahid Beheshti terminal continues to suffer due to the threat of American sanctions.

Read here: [India and Central Asia](#)

What policies should India adopt?

If India wants to **counter the China-Pakistan axis** and 'Great Game' rivalries that are playing out in the region, it should redouble its efforts towards Central Asia. It should reclaim its shared history with countries that are an important market, a source for energy, and also a bulwark against the threats of extremism and radicalization.

10. Exam-conducting bodies must support candidates with disabilities

Source: This post is based on the article "**Exam-conducting bodies must support candidates with disabilities**" published in the **Indian Express** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Mechanisms, Laws, Institutions and Bodies constituted for the Protection and Betterment of these Vulnerable Sections.

Relevance: Understanding the rights of disabled people.

News: Recently, a student who suffered from dysgraphia (a disorder that causes impaired handwriting), has not been allocated a 1-hour compensatory time who appeared for the [National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test \(NEET\)](#) for admission to undergraduate medical courses.

What are the arguments presented by the National Testing Agency?

[National Testing Agency](#), said that the candidate failed to furnish a disability certificate in the format prescribed in the NTA's information bulletin for the examination. The NTA stated that the appellant's case would be considered on the certificate being furnished.

When the candidate tried to obtain this certificate, the appellant was told that the prescribed certificate had to be produced for seeking reservation at the time of admission to a medical college, not at the time of the examination.

What is the court observation?

Bombay High Court: It dismissed the petition due to the candidate's failure to produce the prescribed certificate

Supreme Court: It held that the prescribed certificate had to be produced at the admission stage, not at the examination stage, contrary to claims by the NTA. It further held that the

appellant's invigilators lacked adequate training, owing to which, the appellant had been wrongfully deprived of compensatory time, by virtue of a "tragedy of errors".

SC said that the [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 \(RPwD Act\)](#) recognizes the principle of inclusive education for children and adults with disabilities, which in this case has been violated. Also, **compensatory time is a legal entitlement of the disabled** as per the guidelines issued by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. NTA failed to discharge its positive duty to protect the appellant's right to inclusive education.

Also read: [Disability rights over time](#)

What is the SC judgment?

It said that accepting the NTA's argument would result in the RPwD Act being reduced to a dead letter. It provides two weeks' time to NTA to devise and report a suitable compensatory mechanism for the appellant.

The judgment will help to bring systemic reforms in the NTA, and other exam-conducting bodies, so that in the future disabled people's rights will not get violated.

11. Summit for Democracy: What constitutes democracy is for actual democracy to define

Source: This post is based on the article "What constitutes democracy is for actual democracy to define" published in the **Livemint** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: Understanding the broader aspect of democracy.

News: USA President hosted the "Summit for Democracy". There are 100-plus countries that participated in the summit to build a wide-ranging alliance against autocracies.

Read more: [About the Summit for democracy](#)

Why China and Russia are against the Summit for Democracy?

Both countries criticized the summit as they believe it exhibits a "Cold War Mentality" that would inflame "ideological confrontation and rift in the world".

In retaliation, **China hosted its own International Forum of Democracy**, where it claims **China as true democracy** as it integrates process-oriented democracy with result-oriented democracy, direct democracy with indirect democracy, procedural democracy with substantive democracy. It further released a white paper titled **China: Democracy that works** which says there is no fixed model of democracy as China itself manifests democracy in various forms

Read here: [Defining democracy: Biden's summit is a good context for democracies to remind themselves what the system means](#)

What are the reasons for conflicts between the USA and China?

Former US President, Bill Clinton believed that economic freedom can eventually bring political changes in China. But, being the world's largest economy in purchasing parity terms, 2nd largest at market exchange rates, and the world's largest trading union, democracy is nowhere to be found in China. Instead, China started using its global economic influence for geopolitical ends, as reflected in trade coercion of Australia since 2000 and recently in Lithuania.

USA blamed China for drawing policies that are disadvantaged to the USA and other foreign companies in sectors that seemed strategic. To control China's distorted trade policies, the US

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

urged its business community to not see themselves as mere bystanders in US-China strategic engagement, but to be mindful of how the activities can affect USA National Security and fundamental values.

Read here: [U.S. imposes sanctions against China](#)

What is India's view of democracy?

At the summit, the Indian PM talking about democracy in India said that **democracy can deliver, democracy has delivered and democracy will continue to deliver.**

Read here: [Why India will be scrutinised at Summit for Democracy](#)

12. Fiscal Federalism: The sustained attack on federalism

Source: This post is based on the article **"The sustained attack on federalism"** published in **The Hindu** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

Relevance: Understanding issues of Indian federalism.

News: A Muslim league member from Kerala in the constituent assembly, highlighted that concentrating all powers in the centre will lead to totalitarianism.

What recent measures suggest a concentration of power by the Centre?

1. Increasing monitory share of states in centrally sponsored schemes, 2. The terms of reference of [15th finance commission](#), 3. Imposition of [demonetization](#) without adequate consultation with the states, 4. The institutionalization of [goods and services tax](#) and the subsequent delay in transfer of [GST compensation](#), 5. [one nation one ration](#) etc.

Other policies or measures like the banking regulation act 2020, [the government of national capital territory amendment act, 2021](#), [draft electricity bill 2020](#), [Dam safety Bill 2019](#) etc have also concentrated power in the hands of the Centre.

What is the impact of the fiscal situation of the state?

A large share of non-divisible pool taxes in form of cess in petrol tax and creating the Agriculture Infrastructure Development Cess has resulted in a situation where union government continues to get exclusive benefits of tax collection. This share has jumped from 12.67% in 2019- 2020 to 23.46% in 2020-2021.

When the union government proposed borrowing as an option, states had to accept the proposal, but now they are forced into a debt situation. CAG found that the union government in 2018-19 wrongly treated 47, 272 crores of GST compensation cess in the consolidated fund of India. As per 2021-22 budget estimates, the state's share of unit tax has been reduced to 30% against the mandated 41% as prescribed by the 15th finance commission.

Read here: [Critique of Indian Fiscal Federalism during COVID 19](#)

States were seeking non-tax avenues to generate funds. Union government issued a clarification that funding to chief ministers disaster relief funds will not be considered as CSR expenditure. This is in opposition to the case with PM – CARES. This was followed by the suspension of [MPLAD](#) funds. All these demands resulted in demands for increasing borrowing limits under FRBM from 3 to 5%.

What steps should be taken to resolve this situation?

-It is time for the constitution of a committee like the **Rajamannar committee to study centre-state relations**.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

-As recommended by NCRCW, the state should demand the creation of an institutional framework to mandate and facilitate consultation between unions and the states in areas of legislation under concurrent lists.

-Chief ministers should try to create forums for regular engagement rather than just during times of crisis. For example, Finance Minister Thomas Isaac rallied finance ministers from different states during the initial stages of discussion on the terms of reference of the 15th finance commission. This would be crucial for a discussion on which demands like the extension of GST compensation to 2027 and the inclusion of cess in the divisible pool of taxes.

Read here: [Oxygen for fiscal federalism](#)

Federal flexibility will play a crucial role in shaping the future of democracy. Even come and needs to invest resources towards facilitating effective consultation with states in lawmaking and administration.

13. Raising marriage age won't lead to women's empowerment

Source: This post is based on the article "Raising marriage age won't lead to women's empowerment" published in **Indian Express** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS-2, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors, and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance: To understand the challenges in raising the legal age for marriage.

News: Recently, the Union Cabinet has passed a proposal raising the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years — the same as men.

Read here: [Recommendations given by the Jaya Jaitly committee](#)

Why India should raise the legal age of marriage for women?

1. India is usually near the bottom of the international rankings on gender indicators.
2. India also has the largest absolute number of girls who marry below the age of 18.

Why raising the legal age of marriage for women does not lead to women's empowerment?

Against Global consensus: Globally, the age of 18 is widely regarded as the age of adulthood. It is also viewed as an upper limit in terms of the physical and reproductive maturity of women, as well as the age of majority by child rights conventions to which India is a signatory. Thus, the proposed move will restrict the rights of already adult women.

Laws are meant to set minimum levels: The minimum age is a floor age, not a standard or desirable norm. Raising the age would create a debate on the minimum age at marriage vs the right age at marriage. This is an issue for legal experts to debate.

Raising the age will not ensure healthy mothers and children: If poor women remain poor and malnourished, raising their age of marriage will not ensure healthy motherhood. For example, National Family Health Survey (IV) data reveals that levels of anaemia show no change even at ages of marriage up to 25 years.

So, raising the age will punish the poorest sections of the population, since women from better-off groups tend to marry at higher ages.

Report of the multi-country study by World Bank: In 2017, World Bank estimated that "savings" of no less than \$5 trillion would accrue if marriage before the age of 18 was eliminated. The savings are due to reductions in fertility and consequent reductions in public health investments due to fewer births.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

The same study saw no significant gains from raised age of marriage for women's decision-making, for lowering the levels of violence they face or helping them find employment.

What are the complex problems that need attention?

NFHS-4 shows that only 6.6% were marrying below the age of 15. In other words, the problem in India today is no longer child marriage but late adolescent marriage. But that too is declining according to the NFHS and Census report.

Educational attainments have improved enormously in recent years. But all major data sets mention that the decline in early marriages has been accompanied by a fall in women's employment rates. In other words, the proportion of women not in paid work increases at higher ages of marriage.

What should be done to improve women's empowerment?

Must read: [Raising the legal age of marriage for women – Explained, pointwise](#)

14. Why the Russia-West equation matters to India

Source: This post is based on the article "Why the Russia-West equation matters to India" published in **Indian Express** on **21st December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 2 Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: To understand the present status of Russia-West relations and India's role in it.

News: Russia's geopolitics have always impacted India's international relations. Its present tussle with the west and US on Ukraine will also have great consequences for India.

India-Russia's historic connection and its present status

The Great Game of the 19th century between the British Raj and imperial Russia, the Soviet support for revolutionary movements in Asia, the Russian role in World War II, Moscow's extended Cold War with the West, and post-Soviet Russia's turbulent ties with the US and Europe have all deeply influenced India's national choices.

The 1917 Revolution, the Soviet model of economic development, and Russian geopolitics had a profound impact on 20th century India's worldview.

Why Russia-West relations matter to India?

The Soviet Union has collapsed thirty years ago in December 1991. The breakup of the Soviet Union put an end to the global power structure that emerged after the Second World War.

After 1991, along with India, Russia also roped in China to build a new coalition (RIC). The coalition aims to promote a multipolar world that would limit the dangers of American hyperpower.

The upswing in India's ties with America (since 2000), has coincided with a steady downturn in the relations between Russia and the US. This began to complicate India's great power politics.

For instance, India's purchase of the [Russian S-400 missile](#) and the threat of [US's Sanctions](#) is a classic example.

Read more: [Recent developments in India-Russia Relations – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the present status of Russia-West relations?

The continuous escalation of tensions between Russia and the West culminated in the last few weeks in Ukraine-at the heart of Europe. The US and Russian presidents have been in touch to defuse the crisis.

Last week, Russia presented several proposals for a new European security architecture. The proposals demand to annul its promise to make Ukraine and Georgia — two former Soviet Republics — members of the military alliance. Russia is also proposing an agreement on reducing provocative military activity on its borders.

The US with its extraordinary military resources can't afford to fight in both Asia (with China) and Europe (with Russia). But the US, Belgium and other border countries of Russia see the Russian framework as a gambit of tough negotiations on European security. On the other hand, France and Germany support a reset in relations with Russia.

Read more: [For an honest broker: On Russia and India-China ties](#)

How India should take part in Russia-West relations?

India knew that Russia's international policies have been driven more by national interest and geopolitics, not by their past ideologies. India also knew that stabilising the Asian balance of power will be difficult without a measure of US-Russian cooperation in Europe.

Further, reconciliation of Russia-West relations will make it a lot easier for India to manage its own security challenges. So, India should welcome and support any mutually acceptable security order in Europe.

15. Why raising marriage age of women won't achieve its stated goal

Source: This post is based on the article “**Why raising marriage age of women won't achieve its stated goal**” published in

The Indian Express on 22nd Dec 2021 and “**Raising marriage age won't lead to women's empowerment**” published in **The Indian Express** on 21st Dec 2021. **Syllabus:** GS2 –

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors, and issues arising out of their design and implementation. **Relevance:** Raising the age of marriage of women to 21

News: The move by Union Cabinet to raise the legal minimum age at marriage for women to 21, and introduction of an amendment to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, comes as a blow to women's rights.

The move is neither feasible, nor grounded in evidence, nor respectful of women's rights.

Why the move is not feasible or justified?

A lax record in enforcing earlier laws: The law prohibiting marriage below the age of 18 has been in effect in some form since the 1900s, yet child marriage persists. Moreover, even though more than one in five marriages took place below age 18, hardly any violations of the Act appear in our criminal records.

So when we have failed to even enforce a law against marriage before age 18, it is hardly feasible that we can succeed in enforcing a law that expands the age range

Not based on evidence: It is seen that those women who marry at the age of 21 and later are healthier, better nourished, better educated, and have better career opportunities than those experiencing child marriage. But the reason behind this is not their delayed marriages.

It is because they come from better-off households, don't have to discontinue their education prematurely, have at least one better-educated parent, and do not come from socially excluded castes and tribes. Hence, raising of marriageable age is not justified by evidence too.

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Denial of rights: Romantic relations are increasingly taking place in adolescence in India (*as in the world over*) and some young women will certainly make an informed decision to marry before they are 21. Thus, the present move denies women the right to make informed marriage decisions and their reproductive rights.

What is the way forward?

Enforce the existing law better: Growing evidence shows that the number of child marriages (*under 18*) may have increased in many states during the pandemic and lockdown periods. Hence, government should make efforts to ensure adherence to the present law, rather than raising the marriage age.

To empower disadvantaged women, and to ensure that delay in the timing of marriage happen on its own, without the need for legislation, the following steps can be taken:

- Investments in **reversing the fundamental structural disadvantages** that women who marry early face
- Addressing **issues of equity** - **a)** measures that will enable the disadvantaged women to complete their education, **b)** address safety issues of women in public places including public transportation, and **d)** change the perceptions of parents as they are the ultimate decision-makers on marriage related decisions for a majority of women.

16. How the Code on Wages 'legalises' bonded labour

Source: This post is based on the article "How the Code on Wages 'legalises' bonded labour" published in **The Hindu** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Relevance: The Code on Wages, 2019, Debt bondage

News: The Code on Wages, 2019 gives legal sanction to Debt bondage, by allowing employers to extend limitless credit advances to their workers, and charge an unspecified interest rate on them.

What are the new changes brought in The Code on Wages, 2019?

Even, the weakest safeguards earlier in place under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 has been removed.

Comparison of earlier code vs new code

Minimum Wages (Central) Rules, 1950	The Code on Wages, 2019
Advancement: It provided that; advances made by employer to employee should not exceed an amount equal to wages for two calendar months of the employed person.	Changes made in Advancement criteria: 1) It allows deductions from wages for the recovery of advances of whatever nature, including advances for travelling allowance or conveyance allowance, 2) No Cap on the advance amount provided. 3) It allows the employer to charge interest rate on the advances made to the employee.
Deduction: It provided that the monthly instalment deduction should not exceed 1/4 th of the wages earned in that month.	Changes in Deduction criteria: The Code increases the permissible monthly deduction towards such recovery, up to one-half of the worker's monthly wage.

How the new changes in the Code on Wages institutionalises Debt bondage?

First, by removing the cap on the **advances made**, it allows employers to lend unlimited advances to their workers. This gives the employer more control over the employees.

Second, by adding the clause on **interest**. Moreover, with no details on what might be charged and increasing the deduction amount from 2 to 4 months will trap the employee in a vicious cycle of mounting debt and dwindling income.

The net impact is an open sanction for the bonded labour system to flourish.

Case studies related to Debt Bondage

Sahariya (a primitive tribal group) of Rajasthan: In 2011-12, a series of Sahariya families boldly came out one after the other and spoke of their experiences of violence and even rape at the hands of Sikh, caste Hindu, and Muslim landlords, for whom they had worked as 'halis' for generations.

Large-scale primary survey in a mining cluster of Nagaur district, Rajasthan: It revealed that, one in three workers interviewed had taken advances from their employers ranging from ₹1,000-₹1,50,000 at the time of joining work.

Why debt bondage still exists?

Despite our Constitution, the Labour Codes or various Supreme Court judgments, which have deterred the bonded labour system, it still exists because of the following reasons:

Firstly, Govt has done nothing to ensure the economic security of the labourers.

Secondly, the existence of bonded labour has simply been denied among elected representatives, or grossly understated.

Thirdly, dominant castes don't want to give away their power. According to Anand Teltumbde, the dominant castes understand that if Dalits came to own the means of survival, they will abandon their low status and the social bondage.

Fourthly, the deepening economic inequality to the advantage of the privileged castes and classes.

What are the negative implications?

Firstly, it denies the employee, their families and future generations, of their most basic rights.

Secondly, the disproportionate effect of this huge regression in the Labour Code will fall on Dalits and the landless. Because, the vast proportion of landless agricultural labourers in India, to date, are Dalits.

Thirdly, according to Ambedkar, economic enslavement was an extreme form of coercion, and it makes political freedom meaningless.

What is the way forward?

BR Ambedkar had suggested for state intervention in the economic structure to prevent such practices. He proposed a **complete recast** of rural and agrarian land structures, and state ownership of land.

17. India is keeping an eye on Central Asia

Source: This post is based on the article "India is keeping an eye on Central Asia" published in **Indian Express** on **22nd December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: Understanding the importance of India- Central Asia relations.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

News: India has invited five Central Asian countries – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – as guests for the Republic Day parade on January 26.

Read here: [About India and Central Asia relations](#)

Why has Central Asia become important for the region now?

Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has made Central Asia a prominent player in the region. A firm footing in the region is needed to gain leverage over the Taliban. Central Asia also has vast untapped resources in oil, coal, etc. Geopolitical rivalry as Regional and extra-regional powers are increasing presence in the region in the new Great-game.

Read here: [India-Central Asia Dialogue: Six nations call for 'immediate' aid for Afghans](#)

The USA also hopes to create a central-Asia axis to contain China and Russia. Economically, the centre is shifting from west to east, which is evident in the new silk route and inroads of BRI (China) in the region.

What should India do?

It should look beyond non-alignment and focus on the big-picture of Central Asia. Since India has no direct access to Central Asia, the support of Russia and China becomes essential. Due to this, India's membership of [SCO](#) and [BRICS](#) are welcome steps.

India should also resume the India-China dialogue with the assistance of Russia. This is important for Russia and China also, as Afghanistan falls within the First Circle of their national security agenda.

India should also look to open TAPI and IPI gas pipeline projects. Russia can act as a guarantor, and China would also benefit from the normalization of India-Pakistan relations.

Read here: [Courting the stans: India's outreach to central Asia is vital to counter the China-Pakistan axis](#)

India could also undertake the completion of a 600-KM railway line from Ghurian (near Herat) across northern Afghanistan. This would also facilitate cargo movement from Chabahar to Central Asia and beyond.

The tools like Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) are losing steam and new initiatives like logistics, regional and international transport, free trade agreements need to be brought in the Central Asia century.

Read Here: [India quest for a road to Central Asia](#)

What do India's recent moves signal?

There are challenges in meeting the "4Cs" concept, but the India-Central Asia dialogue and invite on 26th January shows that India has activated the regional diplomacy.

Read here: [Recent developments in India-Central Asia relations](#)

18. Ladakh: A deeply insecure Union Territory

Source: This post is based on the article "A deeply insecure Union Territory" published in **The Hindu** on **22nd December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States.

Relevance: Understanding the present administration of Ladakh.

News: After the passing of the Reorganization Act, Ladakh has little autonomy or participatory democracy.

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How did the administration work before the Reorganisation Act of 2019?

Before the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of 2019 was passed, Ladakh enjoyed a classical three-tier administrative system.

Autonomous Hill Development Councils of Leh and Kargil : It had the powers over land in Ladakh

Bicameral legislative system: It gave Ladakh autonomy and participatory democracy. It also helped to secure the interests of the tribal majority population of Ladakh.

Public Service Commission: Gazetted officers were recruited through the State Public Service Commission (PSC). While the District Service Selection Board made recruitments at the district level.

What is the present situation?

Presently, there is no PSC in Ladakh and the Hill Councils' power to make recruitments at the district level has also been affected by the Lieutenant Governor (LG)'s presence. The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs had recommended in 2019 that Ladakh be declared a tribal area but no action on it yet.

The reorganization Act has taken away participatory democracy from Ladakh. It took away 6 seats of the Members of Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and wakening the functioning of the Hill Councils. The increase in presence of bureaucratic power is visible there.

What is the problem with the working of the LG office?

It has followed a corporate model of working with the majority of the officers are of the Hill Councils and the rest have been recruited through outsourcing agencies. The officers are overworked and fail to address the issues arising due to the transition from State to UT.

There is limited actual engagement with the people on the ground. So, the LG's office has not been able to harmonize with the people of Ladakh.

People of Ladakh are of the opinion that the UT without a legislature is similar to disenfranchisement. This resulted in **Apex Body Leh and the Kargil Democratic Alliance**, two separate groups having differing agendas, now having a common demand of Statehood. They also seek other constitutional safeguards given to the Northeast.

Must read: [Explained: What is the Sixth Schedule, and can Ladakh be included under it?](#)

19. A delicate but necessary mission to Myanmar

Source: This post is based on the article "A delicate but necessary mission to Myanmar" published in **Times of India** on **22nd December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Relevance: Understanding the India Myanmar relations.

News: Indian foreign secretary is on a diplomatic mission to Myanmar.

What are the goals of the current visit?

Insurgent activity: Discussions on the reactivation of insurgent activity along the India-Myanmar border. The recent fatal attack on Colonel Viplav Tripathi and his family, together with four other men of the Assam Rifles is one of the incidents. Insurgent outfits – the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Manipur Naga People's Front (MNPF), are known to be behind this attack.

An influx of refugees: Mizoram is under pressure to provide resources to the people escaping army oppression to seek shelter in Mizoram.

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Read more: [Refugees from Myanmar and India's internal Security challenge](#)

Review the slowdown in the implementation of the bilateral megaprojects: the Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan multimodal connectivity between India's Northeast and Myanmar's Sittwe port is not going as in required pace.

How are Myanmar's relations with other countries?

ASEAN: Myanmar government's failure to adhere to the 'Five-Point Consensus' crafted by ASEAN has created an unprecedented situation. Recently, the PM of Myanmar got barred from attending the annual summits of ASEAN and the China-ASEAN summit.

Recently, Cambodia is planning to meet Myanmar counterparts to end its isolation

Also read: [ASEAN's Initiative to End Political Crisis in Myanmar](#)

USA: Despite its policy of sanctions, the US too is in touch with Myanmar with the visit of various officials, which resulted in the release of imprisoned US journalist Danny Fenster.

Russia: It stated that "joint efforts" can develop Russia-Myanmar cooperation in "economic, military-technical and educational spheres".

What strategy should India adopt?

India should project **dual-track diplomacy**. India was deeply disturbed by the court's unfair verdict delivered against Suu Kyi. India should adopt the balancing approach by cooperating with the military while extending clear support for democracy.

Humanitarian assistance: India has already supplied 2.7 million vaccine doses and wants to do more.

Myanmar on the other hand needs to make its democracy inclusive.

Read here: [Ways to Restore Democracy in Myanmar](#)

20. Looking beyond the Forest Rights Act

Source: This post is based on the article "**Looking beyond the Forest Rights Act**" published in **The Hindu** on **23rd Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues related to Indian tribes

Relevance: Forest right act, Tribal livelihood

News: The supporters of tribal rights allege that the Forest Department is overlooking the genuine claims of the tribal people.

A majority of the tribal communities in India are poor and landless. They practice small-scale farming, pastoralism, and nomadic herding.

On the Human Development Index, the tribal-populated States always rank lower than the national average.

Acknowledging their poor status, the government passed the forest rights act to improve their livelihood.

However, even after 15 years, the Implementation of the Forest rights act is faced with many challenges resulting.

What are the issues in implementation?

Firstly, the act requires the constitution of a **Forest Rights Committee** comprising members from within the village by conducting a Gram Sabha with two-thirds of the members present at the meeting. This process is not followed in many places.

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Reasons

-These committees were mostly constituted by the Panchayat Secretaries upon the directives received from District Magistrates at short notice.

-The nominations for members for the taluk-level and district-level committees were also not transparent.

Secondly, The FRA provides for equal rights in titles issued under the Act for women. They have the equitable role at every stage of decision-making. However, on the ground, the women were hardly visible in this regard.

Thirdly, in the initial stages of implementation, there was an **insistence on satellite images** as evidence while other admissible proofs were ignored, as happened in Gujarat. This resulted in mass rejections of claims by the authorities.

Fourth, various welfare and developmental schemes of the Rural Department were not extended everywhere to the tribal people who received documents of land possession under the FRA. Despite the directives issued by the Ministry to treat them on a par with others.

Fifth, poor awareness levels of FR act among the tribal people is also an issue, especially in the scheduled areas which are remotely located. To effectively present claims, a fair understanding of the Act and its implementation process is necessary.

Sixth, the involvement of NGOs was missing in some interior areas in States like Chhattisgarh, where the insurgency was affecting the lives of the people. Evidence suggests that implementation was better in areas that were fairly close to urban settings or where accessibility was easy.

What are the problems faced by Tribals?

Firstly, tribal areas are witnessing a decline in the quality of forest produce in their vicinity, thus forcing them to look for other sources of livelihood.

Secondly, earnings from activities such as a collection of tendu leaves for rolling local cigars were affected due to the influx of laborers from Bihar who were willing to work for low wages. For ex, Chhattisgarh.

Thirdly, Poor market and exploitation by local traders/middlemen.

Fourthly, they possess lands (including the lands recognised under the FRA) that are small, of poor quality (particularly lands located on hill slopes), and are not very fertile.

Fifthly, to enhance their income, they migrate to work as construction or road-laying labourers.

Lastly, due to the quality of education received by the youth in the remote districts, the possibility of acquiring meaningful jobs remains thin.

What are the suggestions to improve Tribal Livelihood?

NGOs suggest that the livelihoods of the locals would improve if horticulture practices are promoted in addition to bamboo and aloe vera plantations with an assured market.

A popular recommendation to improve tribal livelihood is to enhance medical and ecotourism along the lines of the Kerala model.

Civil society groups suggest providing skill-based education with assured jobs on a large scale to tribals.

21. On Geopolitics of India – As a regional leader, not a victim of circumstance

Source: This post is based on the article “As a regional leader, not a victim of circumstance” published in **The Hindu** on **23rd Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 2 – India and its relation with neighbors

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Relevance: India's leadership role in South Asia

News: The changing geopolitics is demanding India's leadership role in South Asia. But India has failed to rise to the challenge on many occasions.

What are the changing Geopolitics that is impacting the Indian ocean countries?

In the Indian Ocean Conference this month, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar listed the following issues link to India's neighbourhood.

- 1) the rise of China that has resulted in territorial tensions.
- 2) American pull-out from Afghanistan
- 3) The challenges posed by the novel coronavirus pandemic

What are the issues linked to India's Afghan policy?

Firstly, India failed to recognize the U.S's Afghan policy, especially after it signed the Doha Agreement of February 2020.

The Doha Agreement made the Taliban a legitimate interlocutor, without the condition of a ceasefire.

India merely blindsided with the U.S. and the Troika Plus members (Russia, China, and Pakistan) without voicing out its interest. It paved the way for the fall of the Afghan republic.

Secondly, India failed to secure its friends in Afghanistan. India canceled all the visas that had been granted to Afghans prior to August. India resisted allowing Afghans, looking for shelter in India. Afghans felt betrayed by a country they once considered "second home".

Thirdly, India has been reluctant to support or host those who pose a counter to the Taliban regime today. For instance, the "Resistance Front" led by Ahmad Massoud and former Vice-President Amrullah Saleh.

It was in contrast to the 1990s when India kept up its contacts with the Northern Alliance, supported their families in India, and admitted thousands of other Afghan refugees. This response helped India to build closer ties with Afghanistan after the Taliban was defeated in 2001.

What are the issues associated with India's policy in countering China?

Firstly, The Government's reservation towards acknowledging the Chinese actions in Indian territory is seen as an act of low self-esteem.

Secondly, despite dozens of rounds of military and ministerial talks, the Government is unaware of the reasons for the Chinese action. This exposes a lack of strategic thinking.

Those who have analysed the situation more closely have pointed out few objectives behind China's aggression at the LAC

China is looking to reclaim the territories that it has lost over hundreds of years, from the South China Sea to Tibet.

- To restrict India's recent efforts at building border infrastructure, bridges, and roads right up to the LAC.
- To restrict any possible perceived threat to Xinjiang and Tibet.
- To restrict India's ability to threaten China's key Belt and Road project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), including a second link highway it plans from the Mustagh pass in occupied Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan.
- To blunt India's plan to reclaim Aksai Chin and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) militarily.

What needs to be done to counter China's increasing role in India's neighborhood?

First, India should not make spaces for China in its immediate neighborhood. For instance, India's failure in keeping its promises to provide vaccines to its neighbors has impacted India's image as a leader.

Second, India can counter China by invoking its democratic system, which is admired by its neighbors. But before that, India should adhere to democratic principles such as pluralism, representative, inclusive power that respects the rights of each citizen, the media, and civil society.

Thirdly, India should forge its alliance with other countries more carefully, keeping in mind the interest of its neighbors.

Recent surveys by think tanks Carnegie and the Centre for Social and Economic Progress have found that India is a preferred strategic partner for most of the countries in the neighbourhood. However, possible Indian collaborations with the U.S., Japan, Europe, etc. are being seen as "anti-China" collaborations, which these countries would want to avoid.

These partnerships also hamper India's ability to stand up for its neighbours when required. For instance, India could not stand up for Bangladesh when the U.S. chose to slap sanctions on Bangladesh's multi-agency anti-terror Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) force.

Thus, India must stop behaving like a "middle power" and decide its best interests and chart its own course of action in its neighbourhood.

22. The troubling courtroom policymaking by the supreme court

Source: This post is based on the article "**The troubling courtroom policymaking by the supreme court**" published in **The Indian express** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.

Relevance: Judiciary's involvement in administrative sphere, separation of power.

News: A Supreme court bench has sent proposal for the establishment of a National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC) to the law ministry.

There are serious issues of constitutional propriety (*correctness*) with how the apex court is gradually taking over the administration of the district judiciary

More about NJIC , [here](#).

What are the issues with the Supreme Court's approach?

Supreme court entering into states and high court's domain: While the Supreme Court is the apex judicial institution, the Constitution clearly vests the administration of district judiciary (appointments, budgeting, daily running) **with the High Courts and state governments**.

– In the past also, the SC in various cases, has entered into domain of state government and high courts. **For instance:** Various SC judgements involving **All India Judges Association (AIJA)** where Supreme Court has been in a tussle with the government.

– In another case, **Malik Mazhar Sultan v. U P Public Service Commission**, the supreme court expanded the initial litigation question regarding UP Judicial Service Rules, 2001 to include the status of judicial infrastructure in the state.

SC in various cases has appointed an **amici curiae** to advise it on the nature of judicial reforms to be implemented. They are generally selected from amongst the senior lawyers of the Supreme Court only. The problem is that **neither they have any experience** of practising before the district judiciary **nor the skill and time required for policy research**.

Also, as they are appointed by court they are **highly unlikely to point fingers at the judiciary**.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Note – An amicus curiae often referred to as amicus brief is defined as the legal brief where someone who is not a party to a case assists a court by offering information, expertise, or insight that has a bearing on the issues in the case.

Courtroom policymaking by the Supreme Court **lacks public participation**. Policymaking in a democratic polity should be done by political representative elected by the citizens.

It **compromises principle of federalism** (which the court has held to be part of the “basic structure”)

This “one size fits all” solutions does not accommodate the differences between states.

23. Common electoral roll: Electoral reform is welcome, but shouldn't be selective

Source: This post is based on the article “**Electoral reform is welcome, but shouldn't be selective**” published in **Indian Express** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Relevance: To understand the need for a common electoral roll.

News: Recently, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have passed the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021. The bill facilitates a wide array of electoral reform, of which several of them have been pending for over two decades. A common electoral roll can be the next reform the government should consider. In the [recent meeting, the ECI also stressed the same](#).

Must read: [Linking Aadhaar with electoral rolls – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the salient provisions of the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021?

-Extending the qualifying date for registration of young new voters.

Note: A committee of the Ministry of Law and Justice under **Sushil Kumar Modi** has proposed quarterly cut-off dates for voter registration — January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1.

Read here: [Other provisions of the Election Laws \(Amendment\) Bill, 2021](#)

About electoral rolls

The process for making electoral rolls is laid down in the **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**. The primary unit of electoral rolls is the assembly election constituency.

Currently, separate electoral rolls are maintained for elections to the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and local government bodies. Since different elections are held at different times, these electoral rolls should be made every year and kept ready always.

The ECI conducts the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections, and State Election Commissions (SECs) conduct panchayat and municipal elections. The SECs have the option of either adopting the electoral rolls created by the ECI or preparing such rolls on their own.

Most SEIs prefer to use the rolls prepared by the ECI. Some states, however, develop their rolls independently, For instance, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Odisha, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Read more: [The proposal to link Aadhaar with Voter ID is unconstitutional](#)

Why there is a need for a common electoral roll?

1. The **officials** responsible for making both these rolls are the **same**, so a common electoral roll will reduce manpower and cost

2. Considering that a voter for all three tiers of elected bodies is the same, s/he is missing her/his name from one of the rolls, especially the panchayat rolls, is unacceptable,

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3. **Reduce the workload of Teachers:** A major chunk of making electoral rolls fall in the hands of school teachers,
4. The only difference between the PRI and Vidhan Sabha rolls is that the former has information about the ward in which the voter lives. So, this can be integrated.

What needs to be done to adopt a common electoral roll?

-The SECs derive their powers to supervise local body elections from Articles 243K and 243ZA of the Constitution. Hence, all state governments would have to change their electoral laws to adopt ECI electoral rolls for local elections.

-Pilot studies may be conducted in random constituencies to identify the discrepancies between two sets of rolls and their reasons.

Apart from electoral rolls, the government must consider the 40-plus pending proposals, instead of selectively going for politically motivated reforms like [simultaneous elections](#) and [electoral bonds](#).

24. e-shram registration is a stepping stone towards protection of informal workers

Source: This post is based on the article “**e-shram registration is a stepping stone towards protection of informal workers**” published in **The Indian express** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

Relevance: Inclusive growth, Social security of Informal workforce.

News: Data suggests that Indian economy is coming to its pre-pandemic status. But recovery for informal workers and circular migrants is far from complete, as the employment is yet to recover.

Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data shows that employment-population ratio for the period May-August 21 was 36.8 per cent compared to 39.6 per cent in the same period two years ago.

Note-*Circular migration or repeat migration is the temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas, typically for the purpose of employment.*

About e-shram Portal

To provide social security benefits to informal workforce Supreme court directed the government to launch inclusive and universal registration system, which was launched this year and named **e- shram portal**.

MGNREGA and the National Food Security Act (NFSA) are also covered under e-shram initiative Read more [here](#).

Although e-shram is a positive step, but there is **need for a more comprehensive policy** for universalising the social security structure.

What are the implications of the absence of a comprehensive social security policy?

It can lead to **low income** which lead to **lower consumption** which can further lead to **higher hunger and poverty**.

It can increase the **inequality**. As the lack of social security leads to health and educational deprivation which fuels the cycle of inequality.

Hinders equitable and sustainable growth, as per detailed empirical analysis supported by the ILO and UN.

What is the way forward

Schemes should be clubbed and simplified: There are numerous schemes under the e-shram portal which have different eligibility criteria and require much more information than available from worker registration on the portal. The schemes require to be clubbed, and restructured with simpler eligibility criteria to make them universal.

Specific and compulsory benefits of social security should be proposed as are mentioned in [code for social security](#).

Government needs to allocate **sufficient funds for financing universal social protection**. Except in the crisis year 2020-21, expenditure by the central government on all major social security/protection programmes has shown a declining trend; from about **1.64%** of GDP in 2015-16 to **1.25%** of GDP in 2019-20.

In the current policy initiatives like code on social security, the role of states is limited to few areas. As states have been pivotal in extending social protection in the past, it is important that **states and all relevant stakeholders are involved** at all stages of the process.

25. On Omicron: Before the third wave

Source: This post is based on the following articles:

- “**Before the third wave**” published in **Business Standard** on **23rd Dec 2021**.
- “**WHO recommends boosters. India’s stand still not clear. And there’s little domestic research**” published in **TOI** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Issues related to Health

Relevance: Tackling the Omicron variant and containing its spread

News: It is clear that Omicron variant is present within the community and is spreading rapidly. Although, the symptoms from the Omicron variant are mild and rarely result in death, the fact that many infections are said to be asymptomatic is a concern.

This situation, therefore, demands renewed efforts to contain, and the vaccine policy urgently needs revision.

What measures have been taken by the States to contain Omicron?

Some states such as **Delhi** and **Odisha** have been proactive in **limiting social functions and banning public festivities** over the holidays.

Chennai has made the Marina Beach and other **beaches out of bounds** for New Year celebrations.

Haryana has decreed that **only fully vaccinated people will be allowed into public places**, and that includes fuel pumps and mandis, with effect from January 1.

Delhi and **Maharashtra** have also **strengthened beds and oxygen supply**.

All these steps are praiseworthy, but unlikely to stop the spread of the virus unless they are taken on a national level.

What is the WHO’s recommendation on boosters?

WHO’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE) has recognised a “modest to minimal” reduction of vaccine protection against severe disease six months after second dose. It has, therefore, called for “**targeted**” **administration of boosters**.

What is the way forward?

Centre can also play a significant part in containing the Omicron variant:

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Decrease the gap b/w first and second dose: A little under half the population is awaiting the second dose, which is known to offer viable protection against Omicron. Vaccine supplies are no longer an issue, hence, the government should shorten the gap between the first and second doses so that more Indians are fully vaccinated.

Booster dose for the vulnerable: The Centre urgently needs to consider booster doses for the elderly, the vulnerable, and front line workers. It would be a good idea if the states were given the freedom to take this decision.

Mix and match trials: With the West's growing reliance on [mRNA vaccines](#), which are unavailable in India, GoI must invest in local research on **booster** and **mix-and-match trials**.

Must Read: [Mixing and matching of COVID-19 vaccines – Benefits and concerns](#)

Fast track approvals for foreign vaccines: A booster typically requires a different vaccine from the original two doses. Since the bulk of India has had the Covishield jab, the booster would have to be the indigenous Bharat Biotech-ICMR Covaxin. This is simply not being produced in large enough numbers to be available for boosters. Hence, fast-tracking approvals for foreign vaccines should be considered.

Further, as their safety is well established since they have been administered to large numbers of people across the world (including among the vast Indian diaspora), the foreign vaccine makers' **demand to waive indemnity** must be considered.

Must Read: [Indemnity issues hold up US vaccine donation](#)

26. Needed, a public health architecture for India

Source: This post is based on the article "**Needed, a public health architecture for India**" published in The Hindu on **24th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2- Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Relevance: Public health data in India and need for improvements in it.

News: India conducts numerous health surveys, most prominent of which is NFHS. Lately, there have been various additions into NFHS which have made it disoriented and lacking any specific policy purpose.

There is need for selected comprehensive surveys that can broadly cover major public health themes for a complex country like ours.

What is the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)?

Read about NFHS [here](#).

NFHS is used by many researchers, policymakers and **is frequently used by NITI Aayog** for its various rankings.

It is conducted in a representative sample of households, where respondents are mostly women.

Funding for different rounds of NFHS has been provided by some international organisations like United States Agency for International Development (USAID), etc and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Issues have been raised on the **quality of the agencies** conducting NFHS and their workers too.

What are other public health surveys in India, and the associated issues?

Apart from NFHS, Health Ministry conducts the National NCD Monitoring Survey (NNMS), the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS), etc.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

- **Overinclusion**, like inclusion of questions on HIV, non-communicable diseases, or NCDs in NFHS, has led to extremely huge NFHS questionnaires. This affects the quality of data. **Example:** In NFHS-4, the women's questionnaire was 93 pages long.
- Surveys done for **research** should not be confused with those done for **programme monitoring and surveillance needs**.
- **Irregularity and uncertainty of other surveys:** NFHS is the only major survey that India has a record of doing regularly. One does not know if and when the other surveys will be repeated.
- Multiple surveys also raise the **issue of differing estimates**, as is likely, due to sampling differences in the surveys. **For example:** wide divergence in sex ratio at birth reported by the NFHS and the Sample Registration System (SRS).

What should be the way forward?

- **Need to end overdependence on NFHS:** There is a need to **identify a set of national-level indicators and surveys** that will be done using national government funds at regular intervals.
- Need to ensure that the **data is collected in an orderly and regular** manner with appropriate budgetary allocation.
- There should be **clarity of purpose** behind conducting a survey and their need should be reanalysed.
- States should invest in conducting focused **State-level surveys**.
- For a detailed understanding of some issues, **each round of survey can focus on a specific area of interest**. Other important public health questions can be answered by specific studies (which may or may not need a national-level study), conducted by academic institutions on a research mode based on availability of funding.
- It is also very essential to ensure that the **data** arising from these surveys are **in the public domain**. So that it can be analysed through **different viewpoints**.

27. This clean cooking fuel plan needs more firing up

Source: This post is based on the article “**This clean cooking fuel plan needs more firing up**” published in **The Hindu** on **24th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States.

Relevance: Importance of clean cooking fuel and how to improve its adoption.

News: LPG Penetration in India has reached a significant level, but there is still need for some adaptations so that this momentum for clean fuel is maintained.

What is the status of adoption of clean fuel in India?

Around **eight crore customers** were enlisted in late 2019 for LPG connections.

Previously, there were hundreds of villages where there was not a single LPG connection, but they now have a noticeable presence of LPG users and distributors.

This all has become possible due to the successful implementation of [Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana \(PMUY\)](#)

How Ujjwala has delivered such positive results?

- Successful implementation of the **Direct Benefit Transfer of LPG (DBTL) or PAHAL** (Pratyaksh Hanstantrit Labh) scheme of 2014 freed up the **financial resources** needed to make large-scale programme for deposit-free LPG connections a reality.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

– **Production of cylinders, pressure regulators**, hose and affordable LPG stoves was **enhanced**.

– New **distributors/dealers** were appointed to reach **remote pockets**.

– **Political representatives** helped to sustain **enthusiasm** for Ujjwala, and ensure its **implementation on ground**.

What are the environmental and health benefits of clean fuel?

– Adoption of LPG/Clean fuel by **pregnant women** is said to give **huge health gains** in future.

– LPG is **not a greenhouse gas** (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and assigned with a global warming potential (GWP) factor of zero.

What are the challenges in furthering the cause of clean fuel in India?

– In rural areas people use **multiple types of cooking stoves** – LPG, fuelwood, induction or electric heater, etc to **lower their dependency on any single source**.

– According to the recently released **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5**, there was a **higher prevalence of TB in households that were using solid fuels** when compared to those using clean cooking fuels in most States.

– **Pandemic** has resulted in **LPG prices having gone up** and governmental support focusing on other challenges.

What is the way forward?

– **Need for a sustainable basket:** Overall, the push has to be such that every household moves toward adopting a more sustainable cooking energy basket.

Solar, electric heater, improved biomass chulha and biogas can be part of this as they also have similar health and environmental benefits as LPG. This can be done by **introducing alternative remunerative uses for cow dung and bio mass**.

Chhattisgarh has introduced a scheme on procurement of cow dung.

– Further **Improvements in demand-supply** chain of LPG with options for refill financing for poor households.

– **Women's incomes** can be given a boost through the **National Rural Livelihoods Mission** which can nudge them to choose a more sustainable cooking mix.

28. So, no one killed news television ratings: Ring a bell?

Source: This post is based on the article “**So, no one killed news television ratings: Ring a bell?**” published in **Livemint** on **24th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 2 – issues related to the regulation of TV, Print, Media

Relevance: News TV ratings, BARC

News: Suspension of news TV ratings is illogical. It would lead to a severe loss of credibility and revenue for the news genre. The ratings need to be restored at the earliest.

Why the news rating suspension is not justified?

Firstly, if the suspension was because of some case of television rating point (TRP) adulteration in Mumbai, then why did the suspension not apply to non-news channels.

Secondly, if the issues were Sample-size inadequacy, then channels that have even smaller samples than for news are not stopped. For example, English special-interest channels.

Even if the above-said issues (TRP adulteration & Sample-size inadequacy), are the reasons for stalling news TV ratings, there are solutions to address these issues.

What are the suggestions that could make BARC data malpractice (if any)-proof?

First, the raw data collected programmatically by BARC should be parallelly stored in the safe custody of an independent body like the Indian Statistical Institute, or the like, outside BARC control. This will ensure that such raw data stays as it is, tamper-proof, for any future reference.

Second, all interference in data analysis, like eliminating any exception or aberration, should be done under a transparent and uniform standard operating procedure. It should be available for an audit review.

Three, the sample homes should be audited and rotated periodically to ensure that they offer a fair representation of the country's TV-watching population.

Four, Sampling inadequacy can be addressed if minute-by-minute data is not collected for low-viewership genres. If the sample applies to the entire day/week/month, the inadequacy of its size could easily be dealt with.

Five, data ratings should be done on a monthly rolling average, so that TRPs are used only as a tool to measure advertising potential and do not adulterate journalistic content.

29. On Sports Culture – Every sportsperson is a champion

Source: This post is based on the article “**Every sportsperson is a champion**” published in **Indian Express** on **24th Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 2 – Issues related to Sports sector in India

Relevance: India's sporting culture

News: The belief that unless you are winning, you are not a champion is a fallacy. The very fact of participating in sport makes you a champion, and it's time to recognize that.

Over the last decade, India's sporting culture has seen tremendous improvement in terms of

-Parental support,

-The expansion of government and corporate programs such as Khelo India, Fit India, and TOPS,

-The overall social acceptance of sports as a career.

However, there is a lack of attention towards people who are not able to succeed in sports even after giving their best hard work.

The complete lack of definition about what makes a successful sports career further exacerbates this situation.

How Success in academic is different from Success in Sports?

Sports' definition of “success” is largely borrowed from academia. In academics, almost everyone succeeds eventually.

Whereas, In sports, it's the reverse. This eventually leaves less than 5 percent of those entering sport as good enough to be termed a “success”. These are people who win medals at the Olympics, World Championships, World Cups, etc.

While others end up being categorized as “failures” and exit the sport at some stage or the other. Adding to their miseries, the lack of viable post-playing career options as a safety net makes their exit more painful.

Why do we need to look at education and sport from different lenses?

Firstly, in school/education, the number of successful/promoted/graduated/pass students is very high. Whereas in sports, medals are the sole benchmarks of success. Out of many finalists, only one will emerge as the winner.

Secondly, in education, people move on from board results. Whereas, in sport, people leave when they actually fail.

Thirdly, institutions have the support of positive, constructive alumni. But in sport, the scenario is like an organization that has to fire people and the attitude of the people/players is like employees who are laid off.

What needs to be done?

It is important to celebrate the stories of, 95% of people, who have taken successful careers outside sports. Unless these stories are celebrated like our Olympic and world champions, we will be missing out and losing huge human potential.

What is the way forward?

Sport gives us values for life, be it lessons about “failure” or the foundation for our health or the fun and re-creation.

It teaches discipline, the attitude of hard work, awareness and intelligence, planning, and teamwork.

These benefits in physical and cognitive areas should encourage each one of us to play sport.

The positives of sport are immense, but the abnormality discussed above needs to be challenged to have a sustained model for growth in our country.

30. India cannot take a black and white approach to Myanmar

Source: This post is based on the article “**India cannot take a black and white approach to Myanmar**” published in **The Indian express** on **24th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS2 – India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Relevance: Bilateral relations of India to its neighbours

News: Myanmar has seen a lot of political disorder since the military coup in February 2021. The Indian foreign Secretary’s recent visit to Myanmar will help India-Myanmar bilateral relation to adjust to this change.

India needs to adopt a pragmatic approach.

Must read: [India’s strategy for Myanmar](#)

What are the new and emerging challenges in the India-Myanmar relations?

1) Dilemma to engage with Military regime: Since the coup, India has been firm that the gains made by Myanmar over the last decade on the path towards democracy should not be lost.

Further, any **democratic transition** in Myanmar cannot be done without involving the Junta, so it is imperative that India keeps all channel of communication open with it.

2) Most of the countries in India and Myanmar’s neighbourhood like ASEAN members, Japan, Korea etc have started to deeply engage with the military regime in Myanmar and India can’t lag behind.

3) China’s growing dominance: Ever since the coup, China’s economic grip over Myanmar has only become tighter with a special focus on projects critical for the **China-Myanmar Economic Corridor**. Hence, India needs to have **continuous dialogue** with Myanmar keep the security situation in **North east under control**.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Chinese capacity to create trouble in the North East was visible recently, from the last month's deadly **attack on an Assam Rifles** convoy near the Myanmar border in Manipur. Its increasing influence over Myanmar, only provides with further options to destabilise Indian border areas.

4) Porous borders and Pandemic: India-Myanmar have porous borders at many places. For India, a humanitarian crisis as a result of the pandemic-induced economic crisis in Myanmar can become a major issue.

ForumIAS

General Studies Paper - 3

General Studies - 3

1. Neither ban nor regulate crypto

Source: This post is based on the article “Neither ban nor regulate crypto” published in **The Hindu** on 20th Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 – Information Technology

Relevance: Regulating Cryptocurrencies

News: Millions of Indians are gambling on cryptocurrencies in the hope that its value will keep rising. This hope is based on the ultimate belief that they will be socially accepted as a valid medium of exchange

Hence, to dampen the enthusiasm for investment and speculation, instead of banning or regulating Cryptocurrencies, the Govt can simply announce that India will never permit cryptocurrencies to be currency.

Must read: [Cryptocurrencies in India: Ban or regulate – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the problem with the regulation of cryptocurrencies?

Regulation of cryptocurrencies as financial instruments is based on the fear of a systemic risk caused by events like the 2008 financial crisis. But, such policies have always led to excessive financialisation, reckless money supply and Wall Street control of economic policy, leading to huge disparities in societies.

Also, there is a ‘**moral hazard**’ risk of signalling official sanction of cryptocurrencies to speculators and implying government protection. This could **lead to more people trading in cryptocurrencies**. India does not have the resources and governance capacity to set up a new regulatory infrastructure to oversee the interests of speculators gambling in cryptocurrencies.

Hence, the Govt should neither legalise nor regulate cryptocurrencies.

And when it becomes very clear that the government will neither legalise nor regulate cryptocurrencies in India, speculative activity will reduce eventually, even if few investors lose in the process.

2. Interpretation of ARC maladies

Source: This post is based on the article “Interpretation of ARC maladies” published in **Business Standard** on 19th Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Relevance: Regulatory reform of the Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs)

News: Search and seizure operations at 60 premises of four ARCs have exposed the “unholy nexus” between the borrowers and the ARCs.

The four are accused of “**unfair and fraudulent trade practices in acquiring**” the stressed loans.

– The bad loans acquired by them were “far less” than the real value of the securities covering such loans.

– Also, the minimum cash the ARCs paid to the lenders for such loans, typically 15% of the value, came from the defaulting borrowers. The money had been routed through several layers of **dummy companies** controlled by the borrowers or through **hawala channels**.

In light of these events, the regulatory oversight and supervision of ARCs need a revamp and, like other regulated entities, rogue ARCs should be punished.

Must Read: [Asset Reconstruction Company \(ARC\) – Simplified](#)

What are the key recommendations of RBI's committee on ARCs?

1) The minimum capital required for an ARC sponsor to be increased from 10 to 20 per cent to ensure the infusion of capital from financially strong entities.

Meanwhile, the minimum requirement of net owned funds to be raised from Rs 100 crore to Rs 200 crore. This should curb the tendency of some smaller ARCs to acquire financial assets by any means, since they don't have enough capital.

2) Allow the ARCs to establish alternate investment funds (AIFs). This would not only invest in security assets (SRs) but also provide them with the resources to revive sick but potentially viable companies.

3) Widen the investor pool: Broaden the group of qualified buyers who can invest in SRs by bringing in high net worth individuals, corporations, non-banking financial companies, housing finance companies, trusts etc. This will widen the investor pool and deepen the SR market.

4) Reduce the ARCs' minimum investment in SRs from 15% to 2.5% where they have investors in their SRs. This will arm the ARCs with additional resources to acquire bad loans, while the seller banks will get more cash.

5) Creating a secondary market for SRs: Banks should fix the reserve price for SRs because presently there is a mismatch in prices since most SRs are not backed by underlying securities.

6) Permit the ARCs to acquire stressed loans taken by borrowers from overseas banks and financial institutions, asset management companies etc. The rise in the number of sellers of bad assets will facilitate debt aggregation, leading to an early resolution.

7) Lenders should prepare a list of bad loans up for sale every year and share it with the ARCs. They should also **give reasons why they are not selling all old bad loans** and fix the reserve price of assets to be sold based on two external valuations.

Must Read: [NARCL: Need and Challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the way forward?

Here are a few suggestions given by the author himself:

The **management fee should be linked to the actual recovery/SR redemption** instead of the net asset value, based on the ratings of the SRs. This will ensure that the earnings are based on recovery and not management fees alone.

ARCs should be mandated to have a **board with at least 50% independent directors** meeting the RBI's fit and proper criteria. This will help in raising AIF and bring in independent perspective in decision-making and monitoring performance.

Finally, a **sunset clause** for the ARCs, which is a global norm, should be looked into too.

3. The overlooked case for food losses and waste

Source: This post is based on the article "**The overlooked case for food losses and waste**" published in **Livemint** on **19th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Relevance: Related to Food security, Climate change mitigation.

News: Food loss and waste although a major contributor to global greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions does not get the attention it should. Even major climate negotiations like CoP 26 have failed to discuss it with the required urgency.

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This food sector problem needs to be measured and mitigated as part of the country's fight against climate change.

How Food loss and waste contributes to the climate change?

Greenhouse gas emissions take place in the **production, storage, transport, processing, packaging, distribution and consumption** of the food produced; the **wastage** of this food leads to additional emissions if it ends up in a landfill.

Moreover, the agriculture sector is the **largest user of available freshwater**, which is already a scarce resource in countries like India.

Impact: This is doubly harmful as it adds to **global warming** and leads to **loss of the precious resources** that have gone into production of this huge amount of food.

Nearly 30% of the world's agricultural land is currently being used to produce food that is not going to reach our plates.

IPCC's sixth Assessment Report (AR6) has recently pointed out that human induced global warming may contribute to increased agricultural droughts that may affect food production.

What is the way forward?

As the UN Food Systems Summit points out, prevention of food loss will improve the overall health of people and the natural ecosystem. Following steps can be taken:

Need to measure food loss and waste at the post-harvest and at consumption level: While around 14% of the food is lost between harvest and retail points of sale (also known as post-harvest losses), 17 % is wasted at the level of households, retail outlets, restaurants and other food services worldwide. India needs an understanding of the exact extent of food losses and waste, and its social, economic and environmental impact.

Benefits of relevant data: Evidence-based, coordinated policy action requires relevant data. It also helps to understand the true level of the problem. Good data would aid efforts to increase public awareness of food losses and waste at all levels. Once we have the requisite data, we can set targets for reduction and take specific actions focused on critical loss points and geographical hotspots.

Identifying critical loss points: Focus should be on identifying 'critical loss points' (stages that have the most loss/waste) in a food supply chain and also geographical hotspots for loss/waste in India.

4.MSP for all crops is fiscally unfeasible

Source: This post is based on the article "**MSP for all crops is fiscally unfeasible**" published in **Indian express** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices.

Relevance: Minimum support price, food subsidy, Budget, Fiscal policy.

News: Many Political parties and farmer organizations have recently been demanding to legalise the minimum support prices (MSP).

What is the current MSP policy?

Currently, Government declares MSP for 23 crops, although the main procurement happens largely for rice and wheat to feed the public distribution system (PDS).

– Read more [here](#).

Why legalizing MSP is neither good for the economy nor for the farmers?

Prices of commodities are decided by their overall demand and supply: Even if government decides to legalise MSP, if the MSP is above the market clearing price than the farmers will not get any private buyer, who will not be willing to pay a higher amount.

In that case, the government will have to become the buyer of last resort, putting a lot of pressure on already stressed government revenue. In 2020-21, the food subsidy bill was almost 30% of the net tax revenue of the central government.

Not a policy for 21st century India: MSP regime was introduced in 1965 when India was hugely short of basic staples and living in a “ship-to-mouth” situation. But now with granaries overflowing with rice and wheat, there is a need to rethink and redesign the public procurement system.

MSP policy not even showing desired results currently: Government in last fiscal procured more than 50% of the marketed surplus of rice and wheat. But the market prices of rice and wheat remained below MSP in several states due to leakage from the PDS.

What is the way forward?

Research tells us that the best way to support agriculture in a sustainable and competitive manner is to

– invest in Agri R&D, and

– connect farmers to lucrative markets by building efficient value chains.

For more: Read [here](#) and [here](#)

5. Data Protection Bill: National security, at the cost of citizens' privacy

Source: This post is based on the following articles: “National security, at the cost of citizens' privacy” published in the **Indian Express** on 20th December 2021.

“Disappointed report” published in the **Business Standard** on 19th December 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 Role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges.

Relevance: Understanding the concerns that emerged over Data Protection Bill.

News: Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP) has tabled its report on the Data Protection Bill in both houses.

Also Read: [The draft personal data protection bill, 2018](#)

Background

Read here: [Why need of data protection bill arise?](#)

What are the recommendations by JCP on Data Protection Bill?

Read here: [Data Protection Bill: Explained: JCP prescription for data Bill](#)

What are the controversies surrounding the Data Protection Bill?

Surveillance reforms: Bill evades the surveillance reforms which were omitted by the [BN Srikrishna committee](#). So there are no provisions to regulate mass surveillance projects like CCTNS or CMS or NATGRID. Data protection bill inserts the exception clause for the security of the state. This effectively overrides the norms of individual privacy.

Exemption clause: The order invoking the exemption is not a gazetted notification, so it will likely to be exempt from RTI proceedings. Also, the reasons for providing the exemption are not required to be tabled in Parliament.

In contrast, under the UK Data Protection Act, 2018, the national security exemption does not extend to the entire Act. It requires a certificate to be signed by the Minister of the Crown and can be challenged by the affected person before a tribunal.

Read here: [JPC retains exemption clause, adopts personal data Bill](#)

Appointment committee: BN Srikrishna committee proposed an appointment committee consisting of judicial members, with the Chief Justice of India as chairperson, to choose members of DPA (Data Protection Authority).

But the panel now included the cabinet secretary, law secretary and the IT secretary. Also, Under **Clause 87**, the JPC has expanded the power of the central government, as it states, “the authority should be bound by the directions of the central government under all cases and not just on questions of policy”

The move is criticized for compromising the independence of the appointment process. Also in **clause 92**, it makes policies made by the central government override any protections under the Data Protection Bill 2021.

Sensitive data: JCP proposed all contracts enabling businesses to take sensitive personal data out of India’s borders will now need the approval of the central government in addition to the data protection regulator (DPA). This move is criticized as it would add a layer of red tape and could lead to rent-seeking.

Also read: [Opposition Dissent without Basis or Foundation: About the data protection bill](#)

How the bill is different from European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation?

[GDPR](#) covers all individuals regardless of nationality if their personal data is held in the EU. It also offers granular protection against government surveillance, along with a “Right to Forget” clause.

While, In India, the bill doesn’t address concerns about over-reaching government access to private data. The inclusion of social media platforms also appears unnecessary.

6. Insurgencies are defeated by democratic politics, not force

Source: This post is based on the article “**Insurgencies are defeated by democratic politics, not force**” published in the **Livemint** on **20th December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 Linkages between development and spread of extremism.

Relevance: Understanding issues of AFSPA.

News: The incident of Oting, Nagaland has revived the debate of AFSPA. There is a need to hold state authorities accountable and also review how the democratic Indian republic holds together its diverse population.

Read here: [Nagaland killings aren’t a mere ‘blunder’](#)

What is the current status?

Decades after AFSPA was legislated and invoked, many issues of grievance, disaffection, and separatism are still present. AFSPA has become a major tool in the hands of authorities to fight insurgency. This raises many questions like why is AFSPA necessary and how should one politically handle the issue of insurgency?

Read here: [All about AFSPA](#)

Why does AFSPA is necessary?

The army is not a police force. Its personnel are trained to function as a lethal force, risking their own lives. If the army is called in, it is because all other options have failed. To protect both civilians and their uniform counterparts in the conflict zone, there is a need for clear laws and political norms and extra protection for the person serving in the conflict zone.

Read here: [Before criticising AFSPA, a full probe is necessary](#)

Why must AFSPA be lifted after 6 months?

The army is the final resort and must be used minimally, sparingly and for as short as possible. The army must be called in only when a political crisis escalates into armed conflict and is beyond the capability of the state.

Army's task should be to reduce the violence and hand the control back to the state. This is the reason why the duration of six months is built into the legislation.

Read here: [Needed: repeal of AFSPA, not regret](#)

Continuous deployment has a risk of making the army a scapegoat for the failings of political leaders. This may also enmesh soldiers in the political economy of conflict, corrode their professional culture and combat readiness.

Read here: [Repealing AFSPA will not weaken, only strengthen Constitution](#)

How should insurgencies be handled?

There is a need to look at restructuring Rajya Sabha. Giving equal seats to all states will ensure the interest of each state is protected. For example, currently, Nagaland has only one Rajya Sabha seat while Uttar Pradesh has 80. While in comparison to the USA, every state has an equal number of seats in the council of states irrespective of their size.

National integration cannot be achieved by force, it acquires genuine political empowerment of all constituents. Therefore, there is a need to balance the Rajya Sabha.

7. How to get PLIs transform manufacturing

Source: This post is based on the article "How to get PLIs transform manufacturing" published in TOI on 20th Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 – Issues related to manufacturing industries

Relevance: Production linked incentive scheme

News: Recently, the government approved Rs 76,000 crore incentives for promoting domestic semiconductor manufacturing.

There is a need to understand the role of trade and industrialisation in colonisation and its impact on our external trade policy.

It will help us to shape India's current policies in sync with our aspirations of becoming a global economic powerhouse.

Must Read: [Semiconductor manufacturing in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the lessons of the colonial trade regime?

During the colonial trade regime, industrialisation of the west was fuelled by access to cheaper raw materials and access to captive markets from their colonies.

Impact: It limited the industrial growth in the colonies and also subdued their dream to become independent. Because the colonies became dependent for their livelihood on trade with the imperial power.

Lessons Learnt: To become Self-reliant India needs strong domestic manufacturing industries.

How it impacted India's external trade policy?

The above experience was the reason for India to strategize its post-Independence economic development around the central pillar of **rapid industrialisation**.

Protectionism was offered to safeguard industries from the competition of foreign producers. Whereas, the private sector, was confined to non-core sectors in a protected market.

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However, due to many systemic issues, the doors of the economy have been opened to FDI in manufacturing and services after 1991.

Currently, the global disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have again triggered the need for setting up domestic critical manufacture units owing to supply chain disruption.

What are the policy challenges that needs to be addressed to get the most out of the PLI schemes?

As global tech giants seek to diversify their production base and supply chains, indigenous efforts towards self-reliance can be achieved by attracting hi-tech manufacture in India.

However, there are some policy challenges that needs to be addressed to get the most out of the PLI schemes.

First, issues related to Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the EU, UK, Canada and Australia hamper India's access to markets. If India needs to manufacture on a global scale, these issues need to be addressed.

Second, there is a need to maintain consistency in import of critical subcomponents at par with other 'ease of doing business' parameters, especially for PLI-based production. Because, value addition will increase only over time, since the supply chains of hi-tech manufactures are highly diversified.

8. Focus on local bodies in govt push to improve ease of doing business

Source: This post is based on the article "**Focus on local bodies in govt push to improve ease of doing business**" published in **Livemint** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – issues related to Ease of doing business in India.

Relevance: Ease of doing business

News: India wanted to break into the top 50 nations on the Ease of doing business index.

India has moved up from 142 among 189 nations in 2014 to 63 in 2019 in the World Bank's ranking. Experts pointed out that the following steps taken by the government have helped India to break into the top 75 nations in ease of doing business

What are the steps taken so far to improve ease of doing business in India?

Cutting down outdated procedures

Infusing transparency

Minimizing citizen-state interface

Bureaucratic discretion at the sub-national level up to local bodies.

Ranking of states based on their performance

Nudging the states

-For instance, extra borrowing by states was linked to implementing ease of doing business reforms at the state level. The targets given by the Centre included

Eliminating the need for renewing registrations and licences by businesses under various laws setting up a computerized central and random inspection system to ensure the same inspector is not assigned to any unit in subsequent years.

Businesses were to be given prior notice before inspections, and the reports were to be uploaded within 48 hours.

But there is still a long way to go.

What are the existing challenges to ease of doing business in India?

Need for Improvement in the enforcement of a contract: currently, the judicial procedure in India is prone to undue delays. Sometimes it takes 15-20 years for civil disputes to be adjudicated. As a result, India's global rank on enforcement of contracts is a low 163.

Efforts to make land acquisition easier for setting up new factories by legislative amendments have not been successful.

High compliance cost.

What needs to be done further?

Firstly, judicial reforms are needed to simplify dispute resolution.

Secondly, implementing labour codes passed by Parliament would significantly improve the ease of doing business

Thirdly, the cost of compliance, as well as logistics, power, and credit, needs to be addressed. In this regard, suggestions to policymakers include simplifying GST, revision in GST exemption limit for MSMEs and professionals, and even faster bankruptcy resolution.

Fourthly, the individual states should take efforts to make changes in the local laws. Otherwise, the efforts at the national level in easing businesses in India, will not be felt

What are the steps taken so far?

Steps were taken to improve the quality and efficiency of commercial courts: several rounds of meetings have been held with law firms, corporate bodies, chambers of commerce, and industry to work in an integrated manner along with the judicial fraternity.

Steps taken to simplify dispute resolution in India.

After the 2015 legislation, India had set up dedicated commercial courts in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru with dedicated infrastructure for quick disposal of cases. It will help in disposing of cases of in a swift and time-bound manner.

Niti Aayog is currently advocating online dispute resolution, to improve ease of dispute resolution. It helps in handling disputes outside courts, particularly of small and medium-value cases, using digital tech and techniques of alternative resolution such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration.

Steps taken to reduce compliance cost

Niti Aayog has reached out to states to weed out irrelevant compliance requirements.

The department for the promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) is guiding the efforts of central ministries and states to simplify the regulatory architecture and ranks states on the basis of its business reform action plan.

Way forward

it is time to transition from the ease of doing business to the cost of doing business.

9. Can India become a technology leader?

Source: This post is based on the article “Can India become a technology leader?” published in **The Hindu** on 20th Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Science and Technology- Developments.

Relevance: Technology development in India.

News: India-born techies are chosen as the leader by technology giants.

Despite having so many celebrated technologists around the world, India is still not a major player in technology. As a consequence, the talent in India left the country. For instance, as of 2019, there were 2.7 million Indian immigrants in the US.

How other countries are able to succeed in becoming a major player in technology?

In the US: the Invisible hand of the government has been **behind the Success of enterprise and the free market:**

For instance, research by Mariana Mazzucato shows that the state has been crucial to the introduction of the new generation of technologies, including the computers, the Internet, and the nanotech industry.

Example: Public sector funding developed the algorithm that eventually led to Google's success and helped discover the molecular antibodies that provided the foundation for biotechnology.

The case of China: The role of the government has been prominent in shaping the economic growth of China.

For instance, before a decade, China was known for its low-wage manufacturing. However, due to sustained government efforts, it has made successful ventures into **'new strategic industries'** such as alternative fuel cars and renewable energy.

What India can learn from China's Experience?

Strengthening the role of the public sector in strategic sectors:

The Chinese state restructured its state-owned enterprises (SOEs) instead of privatizing. SOEs were strengthened in strategically important sectors such as petrochemicals and telecommunication and in technologically dynamic industries such as electronics and machinery.

On the other hand, the state retreated from light manufacturing and export-oriented sectors, leaving the field open for the private sector.

Localization: China has used its large market size as a bargaining chip in negotiations with foreign firms. Foreign firms were allowed to stay in their markets only when they were ready to localize production and share technologies with the local firms

Aggressive efforts to enhance technological strengths: through its research institutions and SOEs.

What steps were taken by India for the development of the technological sector?

India's planning and industrialisation in the early 1950s: Public sector funding was provided in the latest technologies of the time, including space and atomic research and the establishment of institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). As a result, many of these institutions have over the years attained world-class standards.

The growth of information technology and pharmaceutical industries in Bengaluru and Hyderabad: was mainly due to government support.

What are the impediments for India in becoming a major player in technology?

Firstly, India's poor achievements in school education.

Secondly, the **spending on research and development** as a proportion of GDP declined in India from 0.85% in 1990-91 to 0.65% in 2018. In contrast, this proportion increased over the years in China and South Korea to reach 2.1% and 4.5%, respectively, by 2018.

Thirdly, the country is operating far below its **potential in electronic manufacturing**. For instance, electronic goods and components are the second-largest items, after oil, in India's import bill.

What are the existing Prospects for India to become a major player in technology?

India still possesses favorable supply and demand factors that can propel it into the frontlines of technology.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

First, the number of persons enrolled for tertiary education in India (35.2 million in 2019) is way ahead of the compared to all other countries except China.

Second, graduates from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs as a proportion of all graduates was 32.2% for India in 2019, one of the highest among all countries (**UNESCO data**).

Third, India has a large market for all kinds of new technologies. India will soon have twice the number of Internet users as in the U.S.

What needs to be done?

First, increase public spending to improve the quality of and access to higher education.

Second, universities and public institutions in the country need to be facilitated to enter areas of technology development for which the private sector may have neither the resources nor the patience.

Third, the 'Make in India' initiative will have to go beyond increasing the 'ease of business' for private industry. It should support Indian industry to deepen and broaden its technological capabilities.

Fourth, Strengthening PSU's. So that they can create, and the strategic and knowledge assets they can build.

A strengthened public sector will create more opportunities for private businesses and widen the entrepreneurial base.

Finally, there is a need to establish a mechanism in place for the diffusion of publicly created technologies, along with greater availability of bank credit and other forms of assistance.

10. How does the Fed's taper move impact Indian economy?

Source: This post is based on the article "How does the Fed's taper move impact Indian economy?" published in **Livemint** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Issues related to Inflation.

Relevance: Fed tapering and its impact on Indian economy

News: The US Federal Reserve has decided to speed up its taper timeline because of higher inflation, expanding economic activity and a stronger labour market.

What did the Federal Reserve decide?

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Fed had been buying \$120 billion worth of bonds every month.

Now, the US central bank said it would double the reduction of its monthly asset purchases to \$30 billion, thereby concluding the tapering programme by March 2022 as against the previous timeline of mid-2022.

Why did the Fed speed up the timeline?

The following factors put pressure on the Fed to increase interest rates sooner than planned:

High inflation: US inflation levels spiked to 6.8% (the highest in three decades) in November 2021, due to

- Supply chain disruptions
- Increasing consumer demand led to

Read more: [US inflation and impact on India](#)

Improved labour conditions: Expanding economic activity has also resulted in improved labour market conditions. With the US economy picking up substantially and retail prices

going up dramatically, the Fed is caught between rising inflationary trends and the need to revive the economy.

What are the potential impacts on the Indian economy?

Higher supply side inflation: A weakened rupee would result in increased landed price of crude oil.

Ensuing Impact on RBI's monetary policy: Higher crude oil prices will only worsen the inflation situation in India and might put pressure on RBI to raise rates faster than anticipated.

– Read more: [The question of US monetary policy](#)

11. Why bugs should be a bigger part of the human food chain

Source: This post is based on the article “**Why bugs should be a bigger part of the human food chain**” published in **Livemint** on **21st Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Issues related to Food & environmental security

Relevance: **Insect proteins, Environmental sustainability**

News: Recently, the EU (European Union) approved the use of insects for human consumption.

The decision paves the way for an alternative protein source that can play a critical role in food & nutritional security. Further, the Insect protein Industry has huge economic and environmental potential.

How insect proteins can ensure sustainability in our food system?

Currently, the animal feed industry relies heavily on water and carbon-intensive farming of grains. Globally, animal farms consume more than a third of the world's total grain production. But the cost of agrochemical inputs is increasing, and freshwater resources are becoming increasingly unreliable.

In this context, Insect proteins become a valuable indirect food source as feedstock for poultry, farmed fish, pork, and beef which are currently dependent on environmentally costly soy and corn feeds.

Insect-based animal feeds could be this industry's best solution for building climate resilience, while also helping us manage a food waste crisis.

How insect proteins are environmentally beneficial?

Consider the case of **Black soldier fly larvae** (BSFL). These infant bugs serve as high-quality chicken and fish feed.

However, it requires 1,000 times less land per unit of protein produced compared to soy production, between 50 and 100 times less water, and zero agrochemical inputs.

A notable advantage of BSFL is that they are fed with food waste. It can play a significant role in keeping the organic waste out of landfills and reclaiming those nutrients, so they can re-enter the food chain.

Moreover, the larvae produce a valuable fertilizer rich with nitrogen and microorganisms as a by-product. It is capable of restoring soil quality and enhancing its carbon storage capacity.

What are the present Challenges to the insect proteins Industry?

The issue of cost: While a unit of poultry feed costs several hundred dollars and fish feed costs about \$1,000, insect feeds can cost more than \$2,000. As the industry scales up, these costs are expected to rapidly decline.

What more needs to be done?

Need to focus on reforms in three key areas.

- Increasing the varieties of bugs that can be farmed.
- Expanding the uses for these insect proteins. Now permitted only in certain pet foods and limited poultry and aquaculture applications.
- Enabling insect farmers to utilize post-consumer food waste.

12. India's FTA ambitions in perspective

Source: This post is based on the article “**India's FTA ambitions in perspective**” published in **Business Standard** on **21st Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 3 – issues related to India's FTA policy.

Relevance: FTA's, Regional trade blocs.

News: Recently, India's commerce secretary, stated that trade will find a specific focus in the forthcoming Budget and that India's FTAs will be “very deep”.

The statement appears to be in line with recent global developments. For example, The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the EU-Vietnam FTA, and the 15-member Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

China and Taiwan, request for membership to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The UK has initiated its negotiations for membership to the CPTPP earlier this year.

However, to make FTA negotiations successful, India needs to address some of the following issues that are hampering India's FTA with other regional trade blocs.

What are the issues hampering India's FTA with other regional trade blocs?

Firstly, issues related to labor laws and investor protection provisions impact India's ability to negotiate deep-trade agreements.

Deep trade agreements have been designed over the last two decades to facilitate complex global value chains and the underlying trade-investment-services linkages.

The predominant focus in these agreements is linked to investor protection, intellectual property rights (IPRs) and labour standards.

India has found it difficult to negotiate these issues in its earlier free trade agreements. For instance, issues related to labour laws led to the suspension of the FTA negotiations with the EU in 2013 and pushed these negotiations to 2023.

Furthermore, India's 2016 template for a [model investment treaty](#), may make it difficult for India to negotiate the investor protection provisions. Because it is more state-friendly and includes some burdensome provisions for the foreign investor.

Secondly, a protectionist tariff structure, if not corrected, could remain a hurdle at the preliminary stage of FTA negotiations.

India's tariff structure has been relatively higher than the average MFN tariffs in the manufacturing sector. For example,

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As per World Bank data, the applied, weighted mean tariff rate for manufactured products in India increased from 5.5 percent in 2008 to 6.6 percent in 2019. Whereas it decreased in the case of Vietnam from 5.6 percent to 1.4 percent over the same period.

Thirdly, India's proposed FTAs with Israel, the UAE, Australia, and the UK will not be effective. India should aspire to participate in any of the three major regional hubs. (North America (NA), Europe, and East Asia).

Because FTAs with these hubs will facilitate deeper integration and value chain consolidation. **For instance,**

The EU, whose evolution has resulted in progressively deeper economic integration, has shown the highest levels of intra-regional GVC (Global Value Chain) activity. Later accession of the Central and Eastern European economies to the EU, resulted in their integration in the EU production networks.

Similarly, the China-ASEAN FTA helped intensify regional value chain trade in the sector.

Further, India's inability to participate in any regional GVC hub through a regional FTA is hampering India's investment flows.

13. What rising inequality means

Source: This post is based on the article "What rising inequality means" published in The Hindu on **21th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Relevance: Inequality in India and world, its causes and impacts

News: COVID Pandemic has exposed the inequality present globally.

The middle 40% has 40% of the share in income. This distribution shows the tendency of a **rising middle class** with lower disparity in income. But it also shows that the **status of the poor is worsening** day by day.

The menace of inequality needs to be controlled as it has led to an increase in the number of billionaires in the world while billions don't have the means for a decent life.

Education and similar such domains have the capacity to break the cycle of inequality.

Must Read: [Rising inequality in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the actual reason for this inequality?

Inequality is actually a **result of poor redistributive policies** and **lack of discouragement of accumulation** by governments.

The **Kuznets theory** presents the view that the **average level of income is indicative of inequality**. But this seems to be false as high-income countries such as the U.S. have higher levels of inequality as against countries such as Sweden, which have moderate levels of inequality.

Also, Inequality is sometimes understood to be an **outcome of rising levels of income** in the post-liberalization era. But this preposition also appears to be false as the rise in inequalities in the U.S. and India is higher against a moderate rise in China.

What are the implications of rising inequality?

Rising inequality leads to **rich nations but poor countries**. As inequality rises, resources gradually move into private hands and governments become poor and resource deficient. This may result in the following outcomes:

Firstly, Governments will have a **limited capacity** to act on measures required to tackle inequality.

Secondly, distributional fairness of wealth will be compromised due to private interests.

14. An over-engineered social stock exchange?

Source: This post is based on the article “An over-engineered social stock exchange?” published in **Business Standard** on 21st Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS 3 – Regulatory bodies in India and their functioning.

Relevance: social stock exchange

News: Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in its recent board meeting approved the creation of a social stock exchange.

SEBI has announced the setting up of Social Stock Exchange, on the basis of proposals from the working group under **Ishaat Hussain**, and a technical advisory committee under **Harsh Kumar Bhanwala**.

What are the advantages of setting up a Social Stock Exchange(SSE)?

Firstly, according to SEBI working group, SSEs will facilitate developing a set of procedures, that act as a filter to select only those entities that are creating measurable social impact and reporting such impact.

Secondly, setting up an SSE will bridge the funding gap for the social sector players. For instance, the NGOs operating in diverse sectors. It will enable entities that are listed on the SSE to access donations to help them meet their objectives through predefined instruments.

Will the exchange take off?

International experience shows that only just three of the seven exchanges that were set up, still survive (Canada, Singapore, and Jamaica).

However, Social stock exchanges will take off in India because India’s social sector is very deep. For instance, Rs. 246 billion spent by companies on corporate social responsibility in FY20. Further, there are lakhs of NGO’s operating in very diversified sectors. So,

Will regulation of social stock exchanges hamper its functioning?

Pushing for registration will bring greater transparency to their operations without the burden of a full listing, while giving them much-needed visibility.

For instance, donators can be sure of how efficiently the entity is spending money. Moreover, Registered entities will disclose their governance structures and processes, financial parameters and publish their impact studies on an ongoing basis.

What is the way forward?

NGO Darpan, a database maintained by the Niti Aayog, has self-declared data for over 129,000 NGOs.

SEBI should take things forward by collecting the data from NGO Darpan, validating it, and evaluating it with an evaluation framework across well-defined governance and financial parameters.

15. Blue sky thinking-Net zero aviation is more than a flight of fantasy

Source: This post is based on the article “Blue sky thinking-Net zero aviation is more than a flight of fantasy” published in **Down to earth** on 20th Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS3- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Relevance: Emissions from aviation sector and efforts to reach net-zero target.

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News: Emissions from aviation industry **have almost doubled since 2000** and reached **one billion ton** in 2018.

To reduce emissions from aviation sector and make it net-zero will require a **huge collaborative effort between industry, government and consumers.**

What has been the efforts by the aviation sector towards the net-zero goal?

The aviation sector's progress in cutting emissions has been **very slow.**

At the **COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow**, the industry put forth a plan known as the **Carbon offsetting and reduction scheme for international aviation.**

But the drawback of the scheme is that it is based on carbon offsetting, which means even its implementation will not lead to absolute emission reduction from aviation sector.

It will only encourage another actor to reduce emissions on its behalf at lowest cost.

Although on a positive note the scheme does encourage alternative cleaner fuels.

Why governments have failed to lower emissions from aviation sector?

1) Pollution from aviation is **not counted in the emissions of any country**, leaving little incentive for governments to act.

2) Aviation involves **multiple stakeholders** which makes introducing changes difficult.

What is the way forward?

1) **Enhance production and deployment of new aviation fuels and technologies:** Jet fuel can be replaced with alternatives such as sustainable fuels or electric or hydrogen propulsion.

2) **Update regulatory and certification processes for new types of aircraft**– Electric and hybrid aircraft have been a latest development in this regard but are yet to become a commercially viable option.

They are powered by hydrogen or a battery/ any sustainable fuel.

They not only reduce carbon emissions but also reduce non-CO₂ climate impacts such as oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), soot particles, oxidized Sulphur species, and water vapour.

They also have lower maintenance costs.

3) **Fuel demand can be reduced through efficiencies in route and air traffic management.**

4) **Greener airport and infrastructure** will significantly help lower emissions.

5) Experts like **Pilots and aerospace engineers can be consulted** while designing policies.

16. Gati Shakti: A much-needed fast track to development

Source: This post is based on the article "**Gati Shakti: A much-needed fast track to development**" published in **Indian Express** on **21st December 2021.**

Syllabus: GS 3 Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Relevance: To understand the various Infrastructure projects and the need for Gati Shakti.

News: Gati shakti master plan would help India to converge its infrastructure spending.

Must read: [PM Gati Shakti – National Infrastructure Master Plan – Explained, pointwise](#)

What is the Gati shakti master plan?

Read here: [PM launches Gati Shakti- National Master Plan for infrastructure development](#)

What are the past initiatives to boost infrastructure?

Some of the mega initiatives include the Sagarmala and Bharatmala projects, the establishment of the [National Investment and Infrastructure Fund](#), revisiting Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models on the lines of the Kelkar Committee recommendations, etc.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Other initiatives include Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor (BMEC), the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC), and others.

Read more: [How India's Gati Shakti Plan can have an impact beyond its borders](#)

What are the challenges faced by Infrastructure projects despite various measures?

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2019, India was ranked 70th. On utility infrastructure, India's rank was 103rd which was inferior to many countries like China, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

This is because the infrastructure sector is facing the following challenges,

1. Increase in the supply-demand gap, 2. Inadequate investment, 3. Increasing dependence on the private sector, 4. An underdeveloped financial sector, 5. The infrastructure sector falls under various ministries and departments which have their own priorities, and above all 6. Lack of synergy among different infrastructure sectors, ministries and departments.

All these issues pose challenges to India's dream to be a five trillion economy with an enhanced share of manufacturing in GDP.

Read more: [Gati Shakti can spur behavioural changes for superior governance](#)

How Gati Shakti will resolve the challenges faced by the infrastructure sector?

Gati Shakti will help in realising the goal of the proposed national logistics policy. The Draft National Logistics Policy (2019) aims to reduce the logistics cost from 13-14% to 10%.

Read more: [Gati Shakti: Connecting the silos](#)

17. Delink the good, bad and ugly of online gaming for apt regulation

Source: This post is based on the article "**Delink the good, bad and ugly of online gaming for apt regulation**" published in **Livemint** on **20th Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3- Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Relevance: Presence of Gaming Industry in India, Steps by government to regulate it

News: Recently, a parliamentarian urged the government to come up with a comprehensive framework to regulate online gaming.

The need to regulate online gaming industry is clear as India is home to over 275 gaming companies, more than 15,000 game developers, and around 300 million gamers.

But the issues of illegal betting and gambling should not be mixed up with online gaming. They need to be delinked from each other.

How illegal betting and gambling is carried out in India?

Offshore gambling websites: Most of the betting in India is done on cricket matches, through **websites like Betaway, Bet365 and DafaBet**. These websites are headquartered in tax havens like Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar but are accessible to Indian users.

Third party wallets: In India, third-party wallets like Skrill and Neteller are used to funnel money into gambling sites. Users deposit money from their bank accounts into these prepaid wallets, which can be used to make payments anonymously.

What is the game of skill versus chance debate?

Various High courts have legitimized gaming formats like fantasy sports etc as online games of skill.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Rulings like **Varun Gumber vs Chandigarh (Punjab & Haryana High Court)**, **Gurdeep Singh Sachar vs Union of India (Bombay High Court)** and **Avinash Mehrotra vs Rajasthan (Supreme Court)** – have found fantasy sports of a predominant format to be games of skill.

In the **Junglee Games case**, the Madras High Court ruled that games like Poker and Rummy are games of skill.

Fantasy sport is a type of game, often played using the Internet, where participants assemble imaginary or virtual teams composed of proxies of real players of a professional sport.

How can the Govt address the issue?

Firstly, the centre can take steps to **block sites under Section 69A of the Information Technology (IT) Act**. Stringent measures are also required to **prevent illegal services being advertised or promoted** through direct or surrogate means online.

– **Rule 3(1)(b) of the IT Rules, 2021** prohibits intermediaries from posting or hosting content that encourages gambling or money laundering. But rules to penalize such advertisements **need to be extended to the entire online ecosystem**.

Second, since the blocking of illegal websites lies in the Centre's jurisdiction, states may follow the **Maharashtra Police's model** to deal with digital piracy.

The Maharashtra Cyber Digital Crime United (MCDU), formed in 2017, works with media and entertainment businesses to identify and take down websites engaged in the dissemination of pirated content.

States can undertake a similar exercise against illegal betting websites, with support from the gaming industry.

Moreover, **consumer interest groups** should be brought in into anti-gambling efforts, to spread awareness and provide forums to **report illegal platforms**.

Finally, the Centre should formulate an overarching **regulatory framework for online games of skill**. India must move beyond skill-versus-chance debates to keep up with the global gaming industry.

Advanced jurisdictions have mostly taken a **hands-off approach** towards skill-based games.

The **UK exempts skill games** from licensing requirements that apply to games of chance.

Likewise, the **US's Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act** carves out a **safe harbour** for fantasy sports.

What is the way forward?

A legal codification of judicial rulings, along with a nuanced classification of different types of online games, could enable targeted and risk-based rule-making.

Such a framework will offer clarity and separate skill-based games from gambling.

Online games represent the best of both Digital India and Make in India, they need a proper legislation for Industry to function smoothly.

18. A fair playing field for ARCs to rival our new bad bank

Source: This post is based on the article “**A fair playing field for ARCs to rival our new bad bank**” published in **Livemint** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Issues related to banking sector

Relevance: NPAs, Bad banks and ARCs

News: ARCs should be treated equally with National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL).

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In many countries, the national bad banks, set up to help clean the balance sheets of banks, make losses. This is because they buy non-performing assets (NPAs) from banks at **inflated value**, and sell them at **market value** after efforts to revive the underlying businesses. So, they require government support to thrive.

However, India can change this trend with the help of Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs). A level playing field to ARCs will improve the asset recovery and allow ARC industry to participate in the process of price discovery in competition with the national bad bank. This can reduce the burden on taxpayers.

Must Read: [Asset Reconstruction Company \(ARC\) – Simplified](#)

How the ARCs have performed till now?

The performance of ARCs has been **poor** till now. **For example**, during the period from 2003-04 to 2012-13, banks and other investors were only **able to recover** about **14.29%** of the amount owed by borrowers.

What are the factors affecting the performance of ARCs?

Constraints imposed by the regulations: Adequate infusion of capital, a pre-condition for successful recovery, was limited by regulations that constrain an ARC's ability to take control of a distressed company. **For instance**, the current proposal allows the NARCL to buy NPAs with a 15-85 split between cash and securities, with the value of these securities guaranteed by the government.

Whereas, Private ARCs will be allowed to place counter-bids, but **ARCs must pay 100% cash**. This does not create a fair playing field. This gives a distinct advantage to NARCL.

NARCL is backed by the government and 15-85 split between cash and securities criteria allows it to infuse more money, whereas ARCs are constrained by capital.

Must Read: [Interpretation of ARC maladies](#)

What are the steps taken to improve the functioning of ARCs?

The panel set up by the RBI had recommended that ARCs should be allowed to **set up alternate investment funds** for the purpose of bringing in capital and competencies for reconstruction.

Must Read: [NARCL: Need and challenges – Explained, pointwise](#)

What needs to be done?

First, it is essential to create a fair playing field between private ARCs and the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL). The **pre-condition of cash requirement needs to be addressed**.

– An **economic model developed by Yogesh Mathur** reveals that the maximum amount any ARC (NARCL included) would be willing to bid rises steeply, as the cash proportion of the deal falls.

Second, setting reserve prices conservatively and adopting a multi-round auction format will result in NPAs moving off the books of banks at fair price.

19. On Plastic pollution

Source: This post is based on the article “**Plastic pollution**” published in **Business Standard** on **22nd Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 – Issues related to Environmental protection

Relevance: Plastic pollution

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News: India's track record in managing plastic pollution compares poorly with that of many other countries.

The latest global **Plastic Management Index**, ranks India 20th among 25 major plastic-producing nations.

What are the reasons?

Lack of infrastructure: According to the [Central Pollution Control Board](#)'s estimates, India produces 3.5 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. The per-head plastic generation, has doubled in the past five years. But the infrastructure for proper handling and disposal of the used plastic stuff has not expanded.

Consequently, the plastic trash lands either at garbage dumping grounds or is scattered on roads, waterways, and other public places.

Negligence in enforcing the regulations by local authorities and pollution control bodies: For instance, "**Extended Producer Responsibility**" principle that binds the stakeholders to collect the same amount of plastic as they generate for proper recycling or disposal remains largely on paper.

What are the negative implications?

The problem concerns mostly the single-use plastic products that tend to last in the ecosystem almost forever because of their non-biodegradable nature.

Impact on Environment: The discarded plastic items, causes traffic hazards or blocking drains, inundating the surrounding areas.

Impact on Live stocks: Stray cattle die, in trying to ingest plastic bags.

Impact on Humans: Human beings also run the risk of plastic toxicity on consuming food items, especially cooked food, packed in non-food grade plastic containers.

What are the steps taken?

The government had announced **phasing out single-use plastic carry bags** with thickness of less than 50 microns, by September 2021 and other items by the end of 2022.

India had piloted, and got passed, a **resolution at the 4th United Nations Environment Assembly in 2019** to mitigate the menace of single-use plastic pollution at global level.

The [Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016](#), the has been updated recently, contains several well-advised measures to control plastic pollution.

Few consumer goods companies using plastic materials have prepared **plans to reduce their plastic footprint** to turn plastic-neutral in a phased manner.

What is the way forward?

At present, the bulk of the plastic rubbish is handled by the unorganised sector, including rag-pickers and waste-dealers (kabadiwalas). They **need to be made part of the overall plastic waste management system**, as they are serving essentially as aggregators of junked plastic stuff.

The governments and pollution control boards at both Central and state levels has to **ensure strict implementation of plastic waste-handling policies and norms**.

20. Our Harmed Forces?

Source: This post is based on the article "**Our Harmed Forces?**" published in **TOI** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Syllabus: GS3 – issues related to Armed forces

Relevance: AFSPA, politicisation of the services

News: Recent tragic incidents have once again brought the public focus on the long-standing issue of the relationship between the defence services and domestic politics. The time has come to pay attention to the issue of the politicisation of defence services.

What events have attracted attention towards the relationship b/w services and politics?

Recent events

- The demand for the withdrawal of the [Armed Forces Special Powers Act \(AFSPA\)](#), and
- the political gains sought to be derived by politicians from nationwide sympathy for the families of soldiers ‘killed’ in a tragic accident, most recently involving the CDS.

Misc event

- The election of a former chief of army staff on a party-political platform and his subsequent induction into the Union council of ministers shows **politicisation of the services**.

What are the issues that needs to be considered w.r.t the demand for the withdrawal of the AFSPA?

Firstly, it’s not just a demand for the withdrawal of AFSPA but in fact for the withdrawal of the armed forces from internal security.

Internal security, be it in Jammu & Kashmir or in Manipur or Nagaland or anywhere else for that matter, should be left to the police and paramilitary forces.

Secondly, even the army members feel that it should not be drawn into internal security, including counterinsurgency operations targeting disaffected citizens, often just civilians. **For instance**, after the recent tragic incident in Nagaland several ex-servicemen, including senior leaders of the defence services, have publicly articulated this view.

Long-term deployment of army as in the case of J&K and some North-eastern states has risked the **reputational loss to army** that is not in the national interest.

What are the other issues that needs consideration?

The issue of politicisation of defence services and their operations for party political benefit.

For instance, the ‘**surgical strikes**’ issue was politicised in the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Further, undertaking a professional assessment of that operation has been hampered due to the fear of political leadership.

The same issues have repeated with regard to a professional assessment of the **India-China stand-off along the LAC**.

In a democracy, informed public discussion even on what are often regarded as purely ‘military’ decisions is a legitimate activity.

The country deserves an analysis of the handling of ‘surgical strikes and border clashes similar to the professional assessment made by Kargil Review Committee.

21. The data protection bills’ reduced emphasis on privacy

Source: This post is based on the article “**The data protection bills’ reduced emphasis on privacy**” published in **Livemint** on **22nd December 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 Challenges to internal security through communication networks.

Relevance: Understanding the data protection bill.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

News: Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP) on the Personal Data Protection (PDP) Bill, 2019 has submitted its report in the Parliament.

Also Read: [The draft personal data protection bill, 2018](#)

What are the key recommendations of the bill?

Children data: It recommended children's personal data be processed in the manner best fitted for the interest of the children. The decision of what constitutes the child's best interest to be left to parents and natural guardians.

Grievance Redressal: Under Section 62 data principals can approach to Data Protection Authority (DPA) if they are not satisfied with how their grievance was redressed by the data fiduciaries.

New definition: Under the new definition of "data fiduciary" and "data processor", it specifically includes nongovernmental organizations also. Although the term "company and any juristic entity" had already been there in an existing one.

Also read: [Data Protection Bill: Explained: JCP prescription for data Bill](#)

What are the concerns associated with the data protection bill?

Section 36: Under the Section 36 clause, the drafts exempts the applicability of Chapter II through VII for law enforcement purposes. These restrictions existed earlier but were qualified like the 2018 draft called for the process to be fair and reasonable. The current draft does away with all such qualifications on the processing of personal data.

Read more: [Draft Personal Data Protection Bill](#)

Section 12: Earlier, the scope of Section 12, permitted personal data to be processed without the consent for performing functions on the grounds – a) provision of services or benefits, b) issuance of certifications, licenses, or permits. Now the scope has been expanded through the insertion of the word "including" to suggest that these categories can be expanded in the future.

Appointment of data protection officers: New draft limits that only the chief executive officer, chief financial officer, or whole-time director of an overseas company can be appointed as data protection officer and not the low-level officials of any company. This might cause a resource-crunch.

Read here: [What are the controversies surrounding the Data Protection Bill?](#)

22. Our semiconductor shortage is likely to persist for a long while

Source: This post is based on the article "Our semiconductor shortage is likely to persist for a long while" published in **Livemint** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life.

Relevance: Regarding semiconductor chip shortage

News: The semiconductor chip shortage, currently impacting the automobile industry, is likely to last longer.

How the semiconductor industry evolved in the mid-80s?

The semiconductor industry underwent a major change in the mid-80s as chips started getting commoditized.

– To protect against price risks and secure heavy investments that go into fabs, chipmakers started asked for **purchase commitments at pre-agreed prices**.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

– And to cover for demand variability, **excess capacity was maintained**.

This means that now, around 80% of all production goes to pre-committed buyers, while the remainder is set for the traders.

Auto industry buys semiconductors from this remainder pool of low cost supplies.

Must Read: [Chipped & vulnerable: GoI must make public investments to encourage private manufacturing in strategic semiconductor industry](#)

What is the way forward?

Short term

In the near-term, the industry can revert to older systems, reducing features in vehicles, and delaying deliveries of vehicles.

Long term

A longer-term response has also started to emerge.

– Samsung has announced a **new chip plant** in Texas. Also, both Ford and GM have said they would get into long-term design and manufacturing arrangements.

– Further, national governments have also started treating chip supplies as a **strategic imperative**. **For instance:** India's newly announced \$10 billion incentive scheme for high-end chip-making can go a long way in establishing a strong electronics manufacturing base in India.

Must Read: [Semiconductor manufacturing in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

23. Will India Pay For RBI's Hurry?

Source: This post is based on the article “Will India Pay For RBI's Hurry?” published in **TOI** on **23rd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3 – Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

Relevance: RBI's guidelines on storage of card payment data

News: The RBI, in Mar 2020, issued guidelines prohibiting merchants (*including all e-commerce websites, streaming platforms*) and payment aggregators (*such as Razorpay and Instamojo*) from storing customer card information. These will come into effect from 1st Jan 2021.

In September 2021, an alternative to the current system was permitted. The alternative system is called **Card-on-file Tokenisation (CoFT)**.

But, even though RBI's move is well-intentioned, **a hurried transition can end up disrupting payment systems in India**, adversely affecting both customers and merchants.

Must Read: [Merchants, companies can't store card data from Jan 1: RBI](#)

What is Card-on-file Tokenisation (CoFT)?

CoFT is the process of de-identifying sensitive cardholder data by replacing the actual card details with an alternative code called the “token”, which is unique for every combination of card and merchant.

The 16-digit credit or debit card number will be **converted into unique codes**. This set of code is called a token. This makes the storage of card details securer than before.

In the tokenisation system, only the **card network** and **issuing bank** will have **access to card data**.

While seemingly ‘simple’, this modification requires an ecosystem-wide change in tech systems and workflows, with sequential compliance from the many entities in the digital payments transaction chain.

Must Read: [Tokenisation: Advantages and Challenges](#)

What are the potential implications of RBI's move?

- Can impact Indian startups and small businesses, which may not be well-equipped to transition to the new system in a short period of time.
- **Lack of operational readiness:** Banks and card networks are not implementation ready. And, it is only post-operational readiness, that merchants will receive the relevant application programme interfaces (APIs) to build, test and integrate a consumer-ready tokenisation solution.
- **Reversal of digital adoption gains:** If merchants and payment aggregators purge card data and transition to the new system before the ecosystem is ready, consumers will be forced to manually input card details for every transaction. This will make digital payments tedious and can lead to a situation where less tech-savvy customers go back to using cash.
- **Increased consumer risk:** The need to repeatedly input card details for every transaction could potentially make consumers more vulnerable to phishing attacks, thus increasing consumer risk rather than reducing it as was intended by the regulations.
- **Impact on small businesses:** It can also disproportionately hurt India's small businesses and startups that make use of the digital payments ecosystem to retain and grow their customer base.
- **Impact on merchants:** Purging of all existing card data without an effective replacement system can also make merchants unable to support customers with subscriptions, refunds, cancellations and other customer service requirements. And at the same time reduce their ability to mitigate frauds during the transition period.

What is the way forward?

RBI should undertake a **thorough assessment of the ecosystem's readiness** before enforcing guidelines.

Phased implementation: Card networks and banks should be mandated to set up their infrastructure first, followed by merchants.

Allow the current system of card storage and the new tokenisation alternative to **co-exist**

Lessons can be learnt from the implementation of the **revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2)** in Europe. In the case of the PSD2 norms, the European Commission set up several working groups & worked closely with industry to adopt standards acceptable to a majority of stakeholders.

24. On PSB privatisation: Avoidable delay

Source: This post is based on the article "**Avoidable delay**" published in **Business Standard** on 22nd Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS3 – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Relevance: Privatisation of Public Sector Banks (PSBs)

News: Although, the Finance Minister had announced in this year's Budget that the government will take up the privatisation of two PSBs.

Yet, it unlikely to happen this year.

The Finance Minister, in a written reply to the Parliament, said that the Cabinet has not taken any decision in this regard.

9 PM Compilation for the Month of December (Fourth Week), 2021

Moreover, the government will need to get the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Acts, 1970 and 1980, and the Banking Regulation Act amended to privatise PSBs.

But the Govt must address a variety of other issues before privatising PSBs.

Must Read: [Privatization of PSBs – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are some issues that need to be addressed?

Govt's stake in privatised banks: It is being reported that the government will retain a 26% stake in the privatised banks. The government holding a significant stake could discourage potential bidders, as it would leave the **scope for interference** in management. This would also mean that the government will be able to **influence appointments**, which will defeat the purpose of privatisation.

Regulatory constraints: There are also regulatory constraints in terms of equity holdings in banks. These can be addressed by putting out a clear road map for reducing Govt stake over a period of time. This would provide clarity to potential investors.

Concerns of the employees: The Govt will also need to address the concerns of existing employees of these banks. Bank employee unions are protesting against privatisation. Govt will need to provide exit options to those not willing to work after the ownership change.

What is the rationale behind privatisation of PSBs?

There are strong reasons for privatisation of PSBs –

– They have been a **burden on public finances** and the government has been borrowing to infuse capital in PSBs.

– Privatisation will allow these banks to **raise growth capital** from the market.

– Bankers in the public sector fear that their business decisions can be questioned by investigative agencies. This reluctance to take decisions affects the flow of credit in the economy. Thus, privatisation will allow the management to **make decisions freely**.

It will not be easy for the government to privatise PSBs. But postponing is unlikely to help.

25. On WTO Ruling against Indian Sugar industry – Lasting solution

Source: This post is based on the article “**Lasting solution**” published in **Business Standard** on 23rd Dec 2021.

Syllabus: GS 3- issues related to sugar industry

Relevance: World Trade Organization, sugarcane subsidies

News: The World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled against India's sugar and sugarcane subsidies

Though, the ruling is inconsequential for the country's current policies concerning the Sugar industry. But it does provide an opportunity to address some of the chronic issues that often require the government to bail this industry out.

Read more here: [WTO panel's sugar report against India](#)

Why the ruling is inconsequential for India as of now?

Firstly, the subsidising of sugar exports by India is not required now. Sugar prices are spiking globally, due to crop damage in Brazil.

As a consequence, the Indian sugar mills are said to have already secured export orders for about 3.8 million tonnes without any government support. The industry seems confident of exporting at least 6 million tonnes of sugar this year.

Secondly, the sugar mills have been permitted to produce ethanol directly from sugarcane juice and sugar for blending with petrol. It has improved the sugar industry's financial health.

Thirdly, Analysts anticipate the global and domestic prices, and supply situation to remain favorable for the local sugar industry in the next season as well.

The current good run in the sugar sector seems like the ideal time to complete the unfinished reforms in this sector.

What are the issues facing the sugar industry?

Disconnect in the prices of sugarcane and sugar (read input and output): This often causes a liquidity crisis in the sugar industry, leading to the accumulation of cane price arrears.

The fair and remunerative prices (FRP) for sugarcane are generally fixed prior to the cane crushing season, without estimating the market price of sugar.

The state-advised cane prices are generally pitched higher than the FRP, due to political reasons.

What are the suggestions to address the issue of disconnect in the prices of sugarcane and sugar?

Implementation of C Rangarajan committee suggestion: The C Rangarajan committee on sugar sector reforms had suggested that the mills should share 70 percent of their revenue from sugar with cane growers. This is in line with the pricing mechanism followed in many other sugar-producing countries. The sugar industry had accepted the Rangarajan formula, but it has been implemented rarely.

Alternative suggestion: To club the prices of sugarcane with the minimum support prices of other crops and refer it to the agricultural pricing committee.

26. Sleepwalking into Chinese control of critical tech

Source: This post is based on the article "**Sleepwalking into Chinese control of critical tech**" published in **Times of India** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3- Challenges to internal security through communication networks.

Relevance: Cybersecurity threat, NavIC.

News: ISRO has signed an agreement with Chinese smart device manufacturer Oppo to work towards providing NavIC (*Navigation with Indian Constellation*) messaging services in mobile phones.

This has wide implications for the national and cybersecurity in the country as there will be huge exchange of data and technical information through this collaboration.

What are the features of this messaging service?

It will **broadcast safety alerts** in areas with poor or no communication, particularly in oceans and during times of disaster.

It will have **military applications** and is the fastest method of informing the citizenry in cases of nuclear, biological or chemical threats.

The news reports also mention exchange of technical information of the NavIC messaging service so as to build various **application-specific solutions**.

What are the issues with this development?

Weaponisation of data: Smartphones are the primary sources of population control in the information age and are a mine for critical personal data. This data from here can be weaponised in multiple ways.

As per **China's National Intelligence and Data Security Law** every individual, organisation and institution have to assist the Chinese Communist Party in all national security interests. Under its '**comprehensive concept of national security**' virtually any issue – military, political, economic, social, technological, cultural etc, comes under intelligence work. This Law also has **extraterritorial jurisdiction**. Therefore, in event of any future contestation between the two armies, this kind of data breach can severely harm our National security.

It will help the Chinese to further embed themselves in the Indian market using the trusted brand image of the Indian space agency. This can be used to enhance **Chinese surveillance of the Indian population**.

Another concern is the **ability of Chinese Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) to surveil, block or edit the content of NavIC** messaging application. The application is on layer 7 of the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) model and vulnerable to both the handset OEM and the OS provider.

About NavIC

USA had denied India the access to GPS data during the Kargil war which would have provided it with vital information. To bridge this gap ISRO developed NavIC.

Read more about NavIC, [here](#) and [here](#)

What is the way forward?

There is need to support genuine Indian product companies based in India, especially in the strategic domains.

27. Turmoil on the high seas-Indian shippers need stability assurers

Source: This post is based on the article "**Turmoil on the high seas-Indian shippers need stability assurers**" published in **Livemint** on **22nd Dec 2021**.

Syllabus: GS3- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports.

Relevance: Shipping Industry in the post pandemic world

News: Global shipping Industry is facing several challenges in the post pandemic world like surging freight rates, logistical bottlenecks and various supply-chain disruptions.

What are the challenges being faced by the shipping industry?

Less capacity, more demand: Due to an unexpected increase in consumer demand for goods after the March 2020 lockdowns, shipping companies have **struggled to locate adequate capacity**. This led to chronic shortages of vessel space, container equipment, warehouses, intermodal hubs, and labour.

Congestion at major regional trans-shipment ports has reduced the daily container sailing capacity, causing backlogs in export shipments.

Increase in shipping rates: Global container shipping rates have increased four to five times from their 2019 levels.

If left unaddressed, these supply-chain issues **can decrease competitiveness of India's booming export industry** and drag down the overall economic recovery.

Must Read: [Winners and losers in shipping crisis](#)

What is the way forward?

– Companies must **strengthen their end-to-end real-time visibility** of supply and demand through a 'global nerve centre, in place of Individual control towers of companies. This will have data all the way from their **international suppliers to their customers**.

This could also help companies spot international multi-modal solutions which may speed up delivery.

To implement this idea in India, companies should provide **technological aid to their distributors** who may lack such IT infrastructure.

– Companies need to immediately revisit **global inventory norms**, especially for critical components like automotive chips that are either fully dependent on imports or have a single supply channel outside the country.

– **Optimization** in supply chain and its **diversification** will lead to better health of shipping Industry.

– Shippers must monitor shipping capacity closely and **track where capacity is being deployed**.

They should **invest resources in materials** which will provide them **high revenue with lower proportionate shipping cost**.

28. The spirit of disinvestment

Source: This post is based on the article "**The spirit of disinvestment**" published in **Business standard** on **24th Dec** 2021.

Syllabus: GS 3 – issues related to mobilisation of resources

Relevance: Disinvestments

News: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has raised questions in a recent report on a smaller deal, involving the purchase by Chennai Port Trust.

What is the issue?

The government is forcing one PSU to buy another to achieve its disinvestment target. For instance, in the recent past, the ONGC took over HPCL.

In the more recent incident, the Chennai Port Trust (ChPT) was forced to buy the government's two-thirds stake in Kamarajar Port Ltd (KPL).

The CAG has rightly pointed out that the current ChPT deal and other similar deals defeat the spirit of disinvestment.

What are the issues/challenges associated with it?

Firstly, It reduces a company's ability to invest and operate. The ChPT is burdened by further debt and an additional interest burden of Rs 142 crore a year. In the case of ONGC, it was forced into a very adverse cash situation.

Secondly, high cost of borrowing. ChPT had to borrow a large part of the Rs 2,400-crore it had to pay for acquiring KPL. This had to be borrowed from the market at 8 per cent interest, according to the auditor. The government could have borrowed the same amount at a much lower interest rate than ChPT did.

Thirdly, the overall drag of public sector borrowing on India's financial savings increases.

Fourthly, the government is not ready to provide the benefits of ownership to the PSU's. For instance, even after ONGC has taken over the HPCL, the government continues to appoint the senior management of HPCL.

Why are the reasons behind the government's steps?

First, the government is faced with a stressed fiscal resource.

Second, an inadequate realization of disinvestment targets; For example, only 5 percent of the 1.75 trillion targets has been achieved so far.

Third, if one public sector unit buys another, then disinvestment does not amount to a higher private share in ownership.

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