



7 PM COMPILATION

1st to 15th April, 2022

Features of 7 PM compilation

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

Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka – Explained, Pointwise
Topic:- International Relations

Sub topic:- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Endangered Languages in India – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- Art & Culture

Sub topic:- Salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Noise Pollution: Causes, Effects and Remedies – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- Environment and Bio-diversity

Sub topic:- Environmental pollution and degradation

India-Australia Trade Agreement – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- International Relations

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

NATO: Historical Context and its Role in Ukraine Conflict – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- International Relations

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

[Yojana April Summary] Fintech Revolution – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- Economic development

Sub topic:- Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

National Medical Register : Advantages and Challenges – Explained, pointwise
Topic:- Governance

Sub topic:- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Food Systems and Climate Change: Impacts and Mitigation Methods- Explained, pointwise
Topic:- Environment and Bio-diversity

Sub topic:- Climate Change

[Yojana April Summary] About Jal Jeevan Mission: Accelerating Socio-Economic Development – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Social Justice

Sub topic:- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Hindi as a Common Language: Constitutional Provisions, Challenges and Suggestions – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Art & Culture

Sub topic:- Salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

India US 2+2 Dialogue and the Dynamics of India-US relations – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- International Relations

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

Retrieving Stolen Idols and Artefacts: Initiatives, Challenges and Way Forward – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Art & Culture

Sub topic:- Salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Ropeways in India: Advantages, Challenges and Suggestions – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Economic development

Sub topic:- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

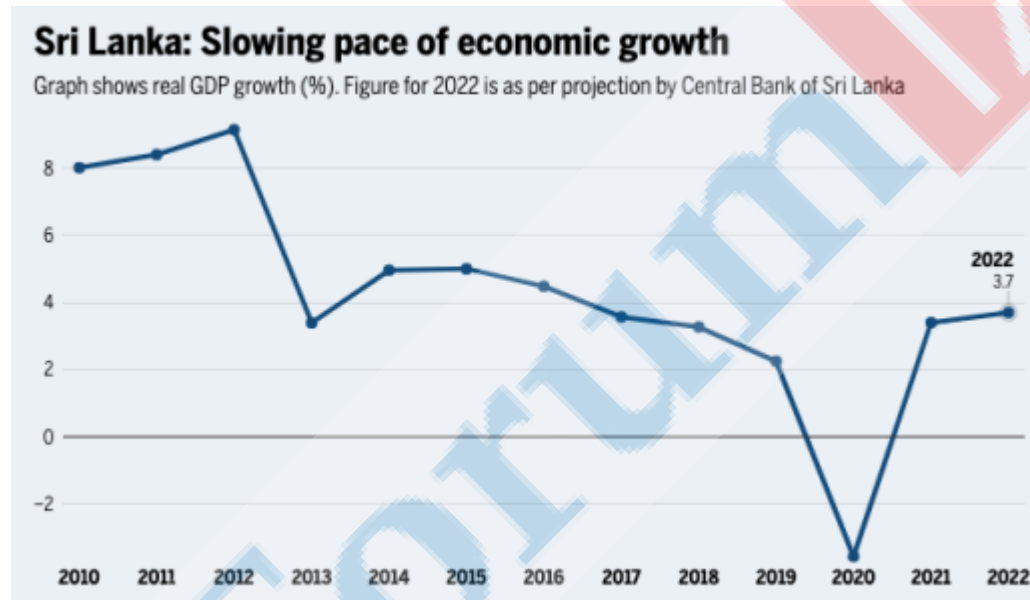
Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

The economic crisis in Sri Lanka has been unprecedented for the island nation. The crisis has been characterized by high inflation and severe shortage of fuel and electricity. High foreign debt, fall in foreign currency reserves, devaluation of currency and series of lockdowns have adversely impacted the economic growth. The crisis has been caused by mismanaged government finances and ill-timed tax cuts, besides the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries like India, China and Bangladesh have stepped in to help Sri Lanka weather this crisis. Sri Lanka might approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to seek financial assistance to effectively combat the economic crisis.

What is the status of the economy of Sri Lanka?

The growth of Sri Lanka's economy slowed down to 1.8% in the fourth quarter of the FY2021-22, with annual growth of 3.7%. This is much lower than projected growth of 5% by the Sri Lanka's Central Bank.



Source: The Times of India

Sri Lanka is left with foreign reserves of only around US\$ 2.31 billion as of February 2022. It faces debt payments of about US\$ 4 billion through the rest of the year, indicating rising susceptibility of defaulting on debt. The US\$ 4 billion debt includes a US\$ 1 billion international sovereign bond that matures in July 2022.

What are the reasons behind the economic crisis?

Poor Economic Policy Decisions: The present Government had come to power in 2019 promising rapid economic growth. The government reduced value-added tax by nearly half and abolished some other taxes as a way to boost consumption and growth. The tax cuts led to a loss of billions of rupees in tax revenues, putting further pressure on the public finances of the already heavily indebted economy.

The Government wanted to become first country to fully adopt organic farming. So the use of chemical fertilizers was banned in April 2021. However, 90% of Sri Lanka's farmers used

chemical fertilizers for cultivation. The move led to drastic reduction in food production, resulting in high prices.

COVID-19: The pandemic dealt a huge blow to the tourism sector, which accounts for over 12% of the Sri Lanka's total economic output. Similarly, remittances from Sri Lankans working overseas also declined sharply. Sri Lanka's public debt is estimated to have risen from 94% in 2019 to 119% of GDP in 2021 during the pandemic period.

Depleting Forex: The country's foreign exchange reserves have fallen 70% in the past two years, from US\$ 8 billion in 2020 to about US\$ 2.31 billion. This has made it difficult to pay for essential imports, including food and fuel. A critical shortfall in foreign currency has enhanced hardships for traders in order to finance their imports.

Global Uncertainties: The crisis got compounded by the Russia-Ukraine conflict that has led to a steep hike in oil prices. The rising prices and depleting forex has led to severe shortage of fuel.

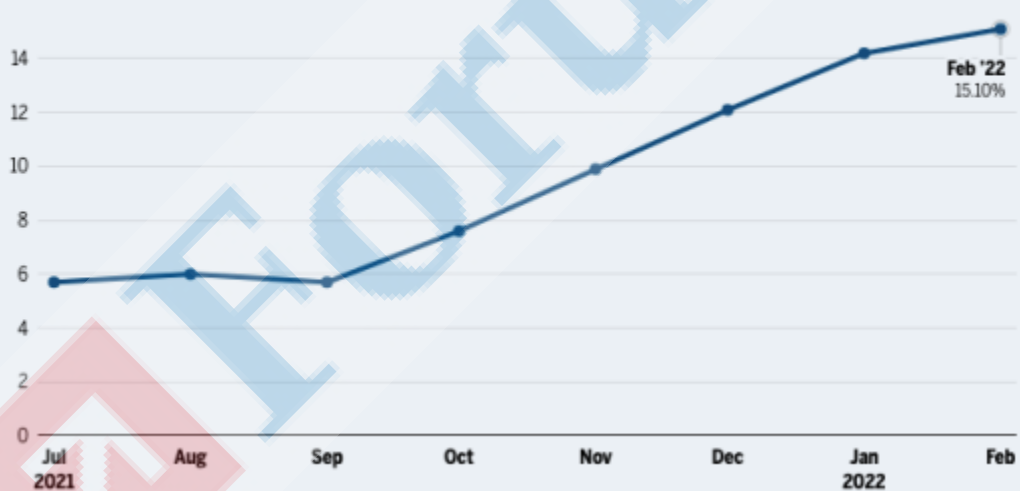
What impact is being created by the crisis?

Unemployment and Poverty: Job losses have become a common phenomenon in almost every household. Besides, fall in earning has led to rise in poverty rates. According to World Bank data, the share of the poor based on a daily income of US\$ 3.20 was estimated to have grown to 11.7% in 2020 from 9.2% a year before.

Rising Inflation: Retail inflation in February 2022 reached 15.1% while food inflation hit 25.7% – the highest in a decade. This has created a severe shortage of food. A cup of tea now costs Rs 100, up from Rs 25 as of October 2021.

Rising inflation has been cause of concern

Graph shows headline inflation rate (%)



Source: The Times of India

Shortage of Fuel: Fuel shortages have led to long lines at petrol stations. A serious shortage of diesel has shut multiple thermal power plants causing rolling power cuts across the nation. There are long power outages with only 4 hours of power a day in most areas.

The electricity crisis has been exacerbated by low water level in reservoirs. Hydro-electricity contributes 40% to Sri Lanka's electricity generation.

Health concerns: Doctor's visit, medicines have also become increasingly expensive. Most people have resorted to self-medication. The WHO has said that this can lead to higher morbidity.

Discontent among the masses: Sri Lanka has witnessed massive protests over shortages and steep prices, with thousands gathering on the main Galle Road in Colombo earlier this month. Some of the protestors are demanding the resignation of the current President.

Forced Migration: The deteriorating situation would induce the native Sri Lankans to migrate to other countries like India, Maldives etc. for better opportunities and a stable environment.

What are the concerns for India?

India's Trade: India relies considerably on Colombo port for global trade given it is a transshipment hub. 60% of India's trans-shipment cargo is handled by the port. Further more than one-fifth of Sri Lanka's total imports come from India but poor economic conditions may reduce income of Indian exporters'.

India's Investment: India is also one of the largest contributors to Foreign Direct Investment in Sri Lanka. FDI from India amounted to about US\$ 1.7 billion from 2005 to 2019. A number of leading companies from India have invested and established their presence in Sri Lanka. These include Indian Oil, Airtel, Taj Hotels, Dabur, Ashok Leyland, Tata Communications, Asian Paints, SBI and ICICI Bank.

Refugee Influx: Refugees, mostly Sri Lankan Tamils, have started arriving in India via the sea-route. The influx is going to rise in future if the crisis does not abate.

Geopolitical Considerations: Sri Lanka is a neighboring country of India whose stability is a sine qua non for ensuring a peaceful and vibrant South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Further, India needs to counter the growing Chinese influence on Sri Lankan economy.

What steps have been taken to combat the economic crisis?

Domestic Measures: The Sri Lankan government has **restricted imports of several items** which have been declared "non-essential. It postponed school exams indefinitely due to a paper shortage.

Sri Lanka deployed troops at petrol stations last week as sporadic protests erupted among thousands of people who had queued up for fuel. The central bank of the country raised interest rates to reduce growing inflationary pressures.

Sri Lanka's central bank has devalued the rupee by up to 15%. It has set an exchange rate limit of 230 rupees per dollar compared to a limit of 200-203 that had prevailed since October 2021.

In December, the Central Bank announced a host of measures including giving an additional 10 rupees per dollar as an incentive. This had limited impact with remittances dropping 61.6% in January to \$259 million from \$675 million a year earlier.

International Measures: Sri Lanka has **asked China to restructure its debt repayments** to help navigate the financial crisis. The country is also in talks with China for a further US\$ 2.5 billion in credit support.

Sri Lanka has sought an **additional credit line of US\$ 1 billion from India** to import essential items, after the Sri Lankan Finance Minister signed a US\$ 1 billion credit line with New Delhi earlier this month.

In addition to the credit lines, India extended a US\$ 400-million currency swap and a US\$ 500-million credit line for fuel purchases to Sri Lanka earlier this year.

What lies ahead?

First, Sri Lanka has shown **keen interest to negotiate with the IMF** in order to prevent the looming Balance of Payment crisis. This deal should be brokered swiftly in order to provide sufficient cushion to the island nation.

Second, the country **should try to revive its key driving sectors like Tourism**. Proactive measures should be undertaken to make sure tourists are safe and secure in the nation. Tourism was brutally hit even before the pandemic when the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings took place and killed more than 250 people.

Third, while the work on building a **transshipment hub in Kerala** has begun, it is still in India's interest to help Sri Lanka come out of the economic crisis. Therefore it must extend more aid and resources to help the island nation.

Conclusion

Economic crisis in Sri Lanka is a reminder to other countries to constantly introspect their economic policies at regular intervals. It provides a lesson to every nation regarding the adverse consequences that can arise due to ill-timed and irrational policy decisions.

India should further enhance its support to Sri Lanka, if required. A peaceful and stable Sri Lanka is in India's long term geopolitical interests.

Source: [Indian Express](#), [Indian Express](#), [The Times of India](#), [Business Standard](#)

Endangered Languages in India – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

Language is any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought. It is a tool for our intellectual and emotional expression. UNESCO has recognized India as one of the most linguistically diverse countries. As per census 2011, more than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India as mother tongues while only 121 languages are spoken by 10,000 or more people. This shows the quantum of endangered languages in India. A number of steps have been taken at the national and international level to conserve the endangered languages but much more needs to be done for giving due protection to the vulnerable languages.

What is the current status of endangered languages in India?

There are 197 languages in India whose survival is in peril. This is the largest number for any country in the world, going by Unesco's Atlas Of The World's Languages In Danger Of Disappearing.

The atlas was first published in 1996, and updated in 2010. It lists about 2,500 endangered languages and also provides analytical reports by region.

UNESCO provides a classification system in its 'Atlas of Endangered languages' as: **(a) Vulnerable** – most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home); **(b) Definitely endangered** – children no longer learn the language as a 'mother tongue' in the home; **(c) Severely endangered** – language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves; **(d) Critically endangered** – the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently; **(e) Extinct** – there are no speakers left.

What are some of the endangered languages in India?

Great Andamanese: It is a generic term for a family of 10 languages once spoken by 10 tribes in the north, south and middle of the Great Andaman. It is now listed as critically endangered by UNESCO.

Balti: It is a Tibetic language natively spoken by the ethnic Balti people in the Baltistan region of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, Nubra Valley of the Leh district and in the Kargil district of Ladakh, India. It is classified as vulnerable by UNESCO.

Asur: The Asur tribe are an Austro-Asiatic ethnic group which mainly resides in the hilly terrain of the Netarhat plateau covering Latehar, Gumla and Lohardaga districts in Jharkhand. They speak the Asuri language which is listed as a severely endangered language in UNESCO's list.

Why do languages become endangered?

Dominance of Majority: The majority community tries to enforce their language on the minority as a mark to show their supremacy. For instance, War between the tribes through the centuries is one of the reasons why tribes such as Tarao lost their identity and language. Today, it is spoken only by around 850 people in Manipur.

Colonization: Some experts point out that the colonial masters imposed their alien language and attributes on the masses of the colony. In this process, they paid little regard to preservation and conservation of native languages.

Government Apathy: There is little chance of a language surviving if it's left out of government patronage for cultural institutions, public libraries, cultural productions, radio broadcasts, primary schooling and administration.

Globalization: Spread of multinational corporations has made English a standard means of communication, which has undermined the use of mother tongue. Further, creation of a common global culture influenced by the west has threatened indigenous language and culture.

Migration: The economic necessities induce people to migrate to new places which results in disintegration of their culture. They start to adopt the language of the migrating place and reduce usage of native language. For instance, **When people from Konkan go to Mumbai** for work, the second or third generation of the family takes up *Bambaiya* Hindi or Marathi.

What is the need to preserve languages?

Gives a Sense of Identity: Languages are the lifeblood of our identity, both individual and collective. They play a significant role in creating and strengthening bonds among people.

Improving Learning Potential: Mother tongue is the first language that a person learns. It promotes learning as the child feels more comfortable to express himself in a language he/she understands and can identify with. The knowledge so learned can be instantly applied in the real world by the children as opposed to other languages which they cannot instantly relate to.

Repository of Knowledge: Native system provides a unique system of knowledge and understanding of the world. It is the repository of our collective knowledge and wisdom which we have amassed over the course of the long journey of our vibrant civilization. For instance, the Asur community of Netarhat were metallists who are believed to have given India iron.

Unity in Diversity: The core principle on which India as a nation has formed is unity in diversity. This includes diversity of language, religion, food etc. and hence if diversity is threatened, our unity will soon come to peril. Moreover it is a fundamental right of communities to preserve their language as per Article 29 of Indian Constitution.

Protecting Biodiversity: There is an emerging consensus between scientists and humanists that biodiversity and linguistic diversity go hand-in-hand. Areas rich in one are usually rich in the other as seen in case of India.

What steps have been taken for their preservation?

Domestic

Constitutional Measures: Article 350A facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage. As per this, every state and a local authority in the state should provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups. The president can issue necessary directions for this purpose.

Article 350B – Special Officer for linguistic minorities: The president should appoint a special officer for linguistic minorities to investigate all matters relating to the constitutional safeguards for linguistic minorities and to report to him. The president should place all such reports before the Parliament and send them to the state government concerned.

Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL): It started with a short-term goal of providing a grammar, dictionary and ethnolinguistic sketch for 117 languages that have 10,000 or fewer speakers. In the long term, it aspires to cover around 500 languages in the future. The scheme is monitored by Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) located in Mysuru, Karnataka.

Central Institute of Indian Languages: It was established in 1969 under the administrative control of the Ministry of Human Resources (Now Ministry of Education). It advises and assists Central as well as State Governments in the matters of language. It also protects and documents minor, minority and tribal languages.

The centre is currently working on around 44 languages from the North-East such as Atong, Bawm, Koireng, Liju, Newari, Lamgang, Singpho, and more.

Global

UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger: It is a tool to monitor the status of endangered languages and the trends in linguistic diversity at the global level.

Endangered Languages Project: It is a worldwide collaboration between indigenous language organizations, linguists, institutions of higher education, and key industry partners to strengthen endangered languages. The foundation of the project is a website, which launched in June 2012.

International Decade of Indigenous Languages: To preserve indigenous languages across the world, the UN general assembly has declared 2022-32 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

What more steps can be taken?

First, the use of technology, especially social media, can be leveraged to sensitize masses about their native languages at a very minimal cost. Dedicated articles and videos can be posted to develop curiosity among the youth towards their language.

Similarly **community radios** can be used to play songs, recite poems etc. in native language as done by the Asur Tribe in Jharkhand.

Second, the government should recognize the efforts of public spirited individuals and groups which are actively working for preserving endangered languages. For instance, the gesture of awarding Padma Shri to at least 5 language champions is a notable step in this regard.

Third, the government should also partner with NGOs and local communities to organize local workshops on language preservation. It should also enhance funding towards initiatives that are launched for language preservation.

Conclusion

Language is a crucial part of culture that is practiced by the community. It is a medium through which their knowledge, customs and beliefs travel from generation to generation. It holds immense significance due to which India should take proactive steps for its preservation and uphold the **spirit of unity in diversity**.

Source: [Mint](#)

Noise Pollution: Causes, Effects and Remedies – Explained, pointwise

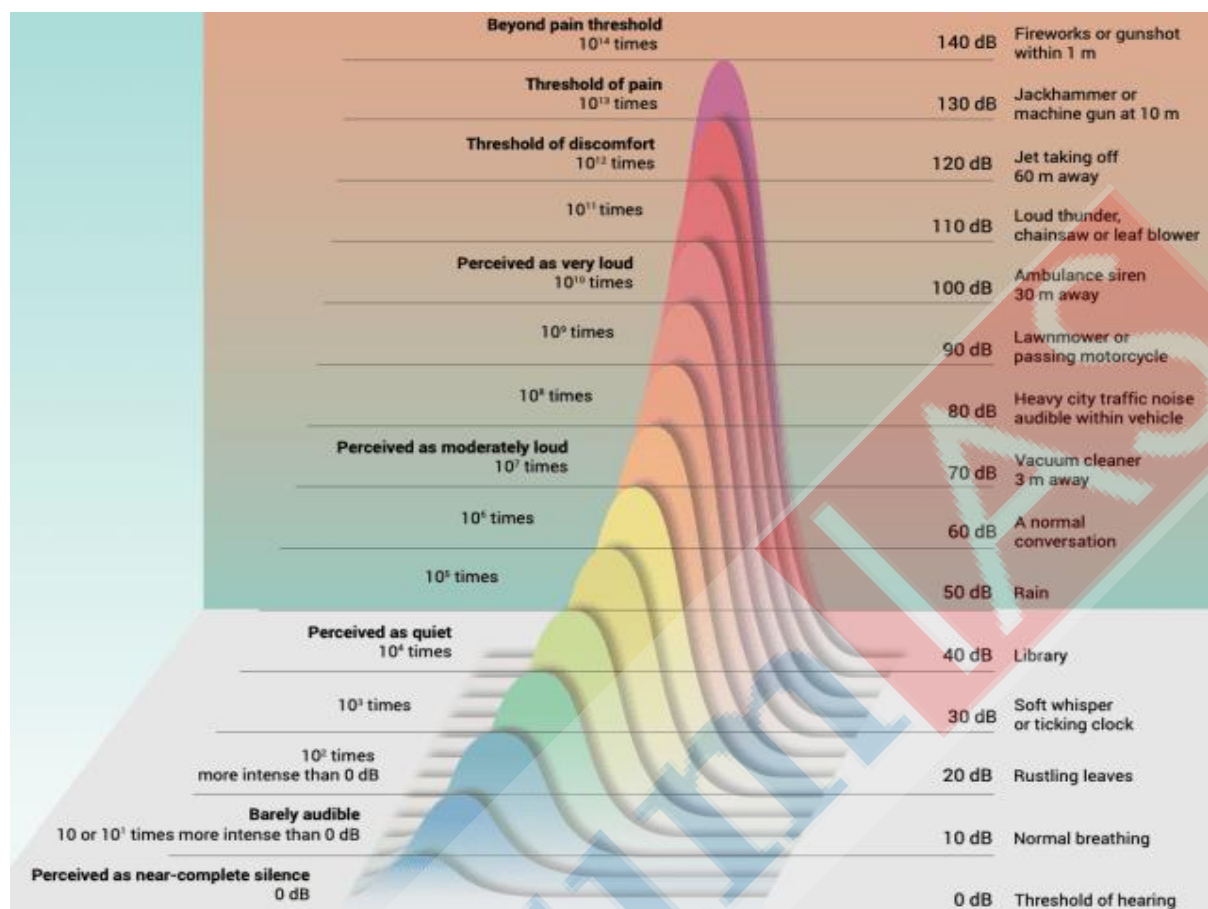
Introduction

UNEP's Frontiers Report identifies and explores areas of emerging or ongoing environmental concern. The 2022 edition delves into three issues: noise pollution in cities, the growing threat of wildfires and shifts in seasonal events – such as flowering, migration and hibernation, an area of study known as phenology. The report observes that as cities grow, noise pollution becomes a top environmental risk. The report identifies the harmful impacts of noise pollution on environment and human health and proposes some solutions which it recommends to be included in city planning with a view to reducing noise pollution.

What is Noise Pollution?

Unwanted sounds are classified as noise. When noises are too loud and persist too long, they become noise pollution. **Noise pollution** is generally defined as **regular exposure to elevated sound levels** that may lead to **adverse effects in humans or other living organisms**.

Decibels (dB) are the units of measure for indicating the intensity or loudness of a sound. It is a unit for expressing the relative intensity of sound on a logarithmic scale. Since it is a logarithmic scale, even small difference in decibel level indicates orders-of-magnitude difference in intensity of sound e.g., a 60-dB, or 6-bel, sound, such as normal speech, is six powers of 10 (i.e., 10^6 , or 1,000,000) times more intense than a barely detectable sound, such as a faint whisper, of 1 dB.



Source: UNEP Frontiers, 2022

According to the World Health Organization, sound levels less than 70 dB are not damaging to living organisms, regardless of how long or consistent the exposure is. Exposure for more than 8 hours to constant noise beyond 85 dB may be hazardous.

Summary of recommended noise exposure limit (World Health Organisation - 1980)

| Environment | Recommended Maximum level | Effects |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Indoor / Domestic Night | 35dB | Increased awakening at higher levels |
| Indoor / Domestic Day | 45dB | Speech communication deteriorates at higher levels |
| Community / Urban Night | 45dB | Difficulty in falling asleep at higher level |
| Community / Urban Day | 55dB | Annoyance increases at higher levels |
| Industrial / Occupational | 75dB | Predictable risk of hearing impairment at higher levels |

Source: WHO, Vikaspedia

What are the key findings of the UNEP's Frontiers Report on Noise Pollution?

Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Asansol and Moradabad are the five Indian cities mentioned in the UNEP's list of cities with maximum noise pollution.

At a maximum value of 114, Moradabad was the second-most-noisiest city in the list. The first was Dhaka, Bangladesh at a maximum value of 119 dB.

Over 72% of Barcelona's residents are exposed to noise levels of over 55 dB. More than half of the residents of large European cities live in areas where noise levels may adversely affect their health and well-being

Two in five residents of Hong Kong are exposed to road traffic noise above the permissible limit. Residents with lower income and poor housing are more exposed to traffic noise compared to wealthier residents.

The report bases its findings from already published research papers or studies on noise pollution in cities world over. These studies typically involve measurements of levels of noise pollution in different parts of the city: residential areas, industrial areas and commercial places during the day and night.

What are the various causes of noise pollution?

Transportation: A large number of vehicles on roads, airplanes flying over houses, underground trains etc. produce heavy noise. According to the Frontiers Report, across the European Union, at least 20% of citizens are currently exposed to road traffic noise levels that are considered harmful to health.

Industrialization: Many industries use big machines like compressors, generators, exhaust fans, grinding mills etc., which produce a large amount of noise. The 114 dB measurement in Moradabad was an average of measurements reported from a factory in an industrial zone.

Social Events: Noise is at its peak in most of the social events like marriage, parties, pub, disco or place of worship etc. People normally flout rules set by the local administration and create nuisance in the area.

Why are the harmful impacts of noise pollution?

Hearing Loss: Experts believe that regular exposure to over 85 dB for an 8-hour day or longer can cause permanent hearing damage.

Sleeping Disorders: Loud noise can hamper sleeping patterns and may lead to irritation and uncomfortable situations. Sleeping disorders can further **disturb the body's circadian rhythm**.

Chronic Health Problems: Noise pollution is a risk factor for the development of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders such as elevated blood pressure, arterial hypertension, coronary heart disease and diabetes. A conservative estimate indicates that long-term exposure to environmental noise contributes to 48,000 new cases of ischemic heart disease and causes 12,000 premature deaths annually in Europe.

Productivity Loss: High levels of noise causes extreme discomfort to workers that adversely impacts their mind and reduces their productivity. This in turn enhances cost of production.

Impact on other species: Traffic and other urban noises disturb and endanger the survival of other species. For instance, Acoustic signals are used in a variety of communication contexts by animals like territory defense, warning of danger, locating or attracting a mate, and caring for offspring. However these functions are severely hindered by noise pollution.

Many species **tend to adapt** to the pollution by **altering their behaviour** e.g., modifying their signals by **switching their vocal frequency** or **altering their vocalization timing**. However, these adaptations can have unintended consequences (like altered vocalization patterns may be considered less attractive by potential mating partner, therefore affecting reproductive success). These consequences might eliminate them from their habitats, with possible significant ecological implications

What steps have been taken to tackle noise pollution?

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB): It is mandated to track noise levels, set standards as well as ensure, via the State units, that sources of excessive noise are controlled. The agency has a monitoring system where sensors are installed in major cities and few cities have the facility to track noise levels in real time.

Noise Pollution (Control and Regulation) Rules, 2000: The rules define ambient noise levels for various areas like residential, industrial or commercial places during the day and night time.

| Area code | Category of area/zone | Limits in dB(A) leq* | |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|
| | | Day time | Night time |
| (A) | Industrial area | 75 | 70 |
| (B) | Commercial area | 65 | 55 |
| (C) | Residential area | 55 | 45 |
| (D) | Silence zones | 50 | 40 |

*dB(A) Leq denotes the time weighted average of the level of sound in decibels on scale A which is relatable to human hearing. Source: Central Pollution Control Board, India

Source: Indian Journal of Community Medicine

Note: According to the Rule 3(5) of The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, an area comprising **not less than 100 metres** around Hospitals, Educational Institutions and Courts may be declared (*by the State Government*) as silence area/zone. There are restrictions on certain activities in the Silence Zones like blowing of horns, bursting of sound-emitting fire crackers or use of sound-emitting construction equipment during night time among others.

National Green Tribunal: It is a dedicated environmental tribunal that was formulated in 2010. Its primary objective is to expeditiously solve environmental cases including violation of noise pollution norms.

What are the concerns in tackling noise pollution?

Narrow meaning of Sound: Policy makers think of sound only in terms of discomfort, such as transport and industrial noise, rather than investigating how to promote sounds that provide comfort. Natural sounds such as flowing water, birdsong, the wind in the trees etc. are soothing sounds that should be promoted.

Reactive Approach: The government on many occasions has adopted a reactive approach where the primary focus is retroactively reducing noise levels. This approach fails to deliver optimum results as manifested by rising sound levels in cities.

Corruption: Prevalence of corruption is a key reason due to which industries and commercial establishments keep on disrespecting environmental norms. They prefer paying a bribe rather than investing huge amounts of money on sound reduction technologies.

What are the ways to reduce Noise Pollution?

First, the focus should be on adopting novel approaches towards noise pollution. For instance, the UNEP Frontiers 2022 recommends adopting a **soundscape approach**.

Under this, experts try to look at the issue of urban acoustic environments more holistically, taking a listener-centered perspective. Soundscape planning aims to deliver pleasant acoustic environments that enhance appreciation of places by people.

Second, noise pollution should be considered within a broader range of environmental challenges **through integrated policies, particularly for the combination of noise and air pollution**. Many countries surveyed by the European Environment Agency report shown better results post integration.

Third, focus should also be placed on **enhancing green cover**. Vegetation in urban environments can absorb acoustic energy, diffuse noise and reduce street amplification. Apart from this, they help in amplifying natural sounds by attracting urban wildlife. This includes measures like tree belts and 'green roofs'.

Fourth, Pathway interventions are engineering solutions that **obstruct the path of noise** from source to receiver by creating a barrier. Both traditional and innovative materials, made from recycled materials such as plastic and car tyres, have proved effective. For instance, Fiberglass from decommissioned wind turbine blades in Denmark have shown a barrier effect reduction of traffic noise levels by 6-7 dB.

Conclusion

Noise pollution is a major environmental problem and is cited as a crucial factor causing risk to health across all age and social groups. Its magnitude and extent is more visible in urban regions, hence a greater focus should be given to them keeping in mind the SDG 11 that calls for creating sustainable cities and communities.

Source: [The Hindu](#), [UNEP](#)

India-Australia Trade Agreement – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

India and Australia enjoy excellent bilateral relations that have undergone transformational evolution in the recent years. The countries have a special partnership characterized by shared values of pluralism, parliamentary democracies, commonwealth traditions, long standing people-to-people ties and increasing high level interaction. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership initiated during the India-Australia Leaders' Virtual Summit (2020) is the cornerstone of their multifaceted bilateral relations. The countries have added another feather to their cap by signing India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (India Australia ECTA) on April 02 2022. It is a path-breaking trade agreement for both countries and is expected to enhance bilateral trade.

What is the current status of India Australia Trade Relations?

Australia is the **17th largest trading partner** of India and India is Australia's **9th largest trading partner**.

India-Australia bilateral trade (both merchandise and services) stood at US\$ 27.5 billion in 2021.

India's merchandise exports to Australia grew by 135% between 2019 and 2021. India's exports to Australia primarily consist of finished products like textiles and apparel, select agriculture and marine products, leather, footwear, furniture, gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals etc. Indian exports to Australia were valued at US\$ 6.9 billion in 2021.

India's merchandise imports from Australia were US\$ 15.1 billion in 2021, consisting largely of raw materials, minerals and intermediate goods.

What is the background of the India Australia Trade Agreement?

Negotiations for the free trade agreement between India and Australia had started in May 2011. The talks gained momentum in 2013, but continued to run into roadblocks e.g., India wanted tariff-free access for Indian agricultural goods in Australia, and a liberal visa regime for Indian professionals.

Australia, meanwhile, wanted duty free market access for its processed foods, wines, dairy products and critical minerals.

India walked out of the Regional Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) in November 2019. However, India and Australia 'started to show some amount of flexibility' as the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and both sides moved closer strategically.

In June 2020, India and Australia upgraded ties to the level of 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership', and signed a defense pact, the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA).

The negotiations for India-Australia ECTA were formally re-launched on 30 September 2021 and concluded on a fast-track basis by the end of March 2022.

What are the key features of the agreement?

EXPANDING TIES

- 
- Labour-intensive sectors such as apparel, jewellery, leather, to get duty-free access in Australian market from the day of implementation
 - Australia has offered 100 per cent market access for all goods from India
 - India has offered lower duty in over 70 per cent of its tariff lines
 - Sensitive sectors such as dairy and agriculture products will be excluded from the deal

Source: Business Standard

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It provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries. The ECTA covers almost all the tariff lines dealt in by India and Australia respectively.

Preferential Market Access

Australia's PMA to India: India will benefit from preferential market access provided by Australia on 100% of its tariff lines. This includes all the labor-intensive sectors which are of interest to India such as Gems and Jewellery, Textiles, leather, footwear etc.

India's PMA to Australia: India will be offering preferential access to Australia on over 70% of its tariff lines. This includes lines of export interest to Australia which are primarily raw materials and intermediaries such as coal, mineral ores and wines etc.

Services Trade

As regards trade in services, **some of the key offers from Australia in the services** space include: Quota for chefs and yoga teachers; Post study work visa of 2-4 years for Indian students on reciprocal basis; mutual recognition of Professional Services and Other licensed/regulating Occupations etc.

India has offered market access to Australia in around 103 sub-sectors and Most Favored Nation in 31 sub-sectors from the 11 broad service sectors. This includes 'business services', 'communication services', 'construction and related engineering services', and so on.

Both sides have also agreed to **a separate Annexure on Pharmaceutical products** under this agreement. This will enable fast track approval for patented, generic and bio-similar medicines.

Excluded Tariff Lines

India has kept many sensitive products in the **exclusion category (29.8% of tariff lines) without offering any concession**. These products include milk and dairy, chickpeas, walnut, pistachio nuts, wheat, rice, bajra, apple, sunflowers seed oil etc..

The agreement also includes **strict rules of origin** to prevent any routing of products from other countries and provides for a safeguard mechanism to address any sudden surges in imports of a product.

What is the significance of India Australia Trade Agreement?

Boosting Trade: Bilateral trade in goods and services for both countries is expected to touch US\$ 45 billion in five years. India's exports of goods and services are expected to increase from US\$ 10.5 billion in 2021 to US\$ 20 billion by 2026-27 and then cross US\$ 35 billion by 2035.



Source: Economic Times

Parity with Competitors: Indian exports face a tariff disadvantage of 4-5% in many labor-intensive sectors vis-à-vis competitors in the Australian market such as China, Thailand, Vietnam, South Korea, Japan etc. This problem would be removed by the current agreement that offers parity treatment to Indian exporters.

Engagement with a Developed Nation: The ECTA is the first agreement with a large developed economy of the world after more than a decade. Australia is also **the third OECD country** after Japan and Korea with which India has signed a free trade agreement (FTA).

Boost to Make in India: Many industries in India will get cheaper raw materials and thus become more competitive, particularly in sectors like steel, aluminum, power, engineering and so on. The agreement is **expected to generate over one million jobs** in India.

Strategic interest: This agreement has strategic significance too, as both India and Australia are part of the **QUAD** and partners in the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (**SCRI**). Further, the agreement will be beneficial for reducing their reliance on China.

Industry Enthusiasm: Industry was consulted at every stage of negotiations, which has helped industry members articulate their overseas market-access interests.

In previous FTAs, India bargained mainly for market access for business professionals under Mode 4 (Movement of Natural Persons). However in the current FTA, the focus is increasingly on foreign-market access for all our merchandise exports.

What lies ahead?

First, the government has successfully negotiated an excellent trade deal for businesses. However, Australia has 16 FTAs under operation which means accessing the Australian market wouldn't be a cakewalk.

India would have to work on improving its competitiveness, as in most trade sectors, it would be competing with China, ASEAN, Chile, Japan, Korea and New Zealand, which have already-functional FTAs with Australia.

Second, active diplomatic engagement would be required to make Australia fulfil its promise to amend its domestic tax law in order to stop taxation of the offshore income of Indian firms providing technical services to Australia.

Once the amendment is made, the Indian tech companies would no longer be required to pay taxes on offshore revenues in Australia. This would enhance their competitiveness in the international market.

Third, India signed an FTA with the UAE in February 2022 and now an FTA has been negotiated with Australia. This success will be helpful in negotiating its future FTA deals with Israel, Canada, UK and the EU.

Conclusion

The India Australia ECTA will further cement the already deep, close and strategic relations between the two countries. It will significantly enhance bilateral trade in goods and services, create new employment opportunities, raise living standards, and improve the general welfare of the peoples of the two countries.

Source: [Mint](#), [PIB](#), [Indian Express](#), [Business Standard](#), [Economic Times](#)

NATO: Historical Context and its Role in Ukraine Conflict – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The war in Ukraine has brought the spotlight on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO was formed in the aftermath of the Second World War by the Western powers in response to the rise of the USSR. The rapid all-round progress made by the USSR, a planned socialist economy, made the capitalist economies uneasy and insecure. Thus, the capitalist West evolved a strategy to contain the spread of socialist ideology and NATO became its military instrument. Some Foreign Policy Experts content that with the disintegration of the USSR in the early 1990s and the collapse of other socialist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, NATO should have been dissolved. Instead, it was refashioned and expanded to realize the hegemonic ambitions of the US, which sought to build a unipolar world order. This enhanced Russian apprehensions of a complete encircling by the western powers. These concerns reached their zenith in recent times when Russia apprehended that NATO might induct Ukraine as a member which induced it to invade Ukraine.

What is NATO?

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a **military alliance** established by the North Atlantic Treaty (also called the Washington Treaty) of April, 1949.

It strives to secure a lasting peace in Europe, based on common values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Its initial members included the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations. However, the membership gradually expanded over the years and eventually reached 30.

It was **established during the Cold War** in response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union. The alliance has remained in place since the end of the Cold War, and has been involved in military operations in the Balkans, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.

NATO is based on the **principle of collective security or defense**. A 'NATO decision' is the expression of the collective will of all 30 member countries since all decisions are taken by consensus.

NATO's headquarters is located at Boulevard Leopold III in the city of Brussels, Belgium.

The most recent member state to be added to NATO was North Macedonia on 27 March 2020. NATO currently recognizes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine as aspiring members.

What are the objectives of NATO?

Political: It promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.

Military: It is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defense clause of NATO's founding treaty or under a United Nations mandate.

Collective Defense: It is committed to the principle that an attack against one or several of its members is considered as an attack against all. This is the principle of collective defense, which is enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.

So far, **Article 5 has been invoked once** – in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001.

Transatlantic Link: NATO is an alliance of countries from Europe and North America. It provides a unique link between these two continents, enabling them to consult and cooperate in the field of defense and security, and conduct multinational crisis-management operations together.

What is NATO's stance in the current Russia-Ukraine conflict?

NATO condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022 and called it unjustified and unprovoked. As per the grouping, this is a grave violation of international law and a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security.

The Alliance also condemned Russia's decision to extend recognition to the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine.

NATO Allies call on Russia to immediately cease its military action and withdraw all its forces from in and around Ukraine.

NATO said that it stands with the people of Ukraine and its legitimate, democratically elected president, parliament and government.

Although direct military action was not provided as Ukraine is not a member of NATO.

Why was NATO not dissolved after the disintegration of the USSR?

U.S's Foreign Policy objectives: After the deterrence offered by the USSR ended, NATO has become an instrument to achieve the US' foreign and defense policy objectives in Europe and Asia.

Huge Geopolitical Influence: NATO has a state-of-the-art arsenal and a combined defense expenditure of US\$ 1.036 trillion (2019). Its 30 members account for close to 60% of the global defense expenditure. This allows it to enjoy a disproportionate advantage and mastery over the international scene by its mere existence.

Changing nature of Security Threats: Many regions and countries around the world are witnessing the acquisition of substantial, modern military capabilities with consequences for international stability and Euro-Atlantic security.

This includes the proliferation of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons which poses a real and growing threat to the Euro-Atlantic area.

Further growing menace of terrorism and cyberspace also requires sustained interaction and cooperation between the NATO members.

Why do some experts suggest that NATO should be dissolved?

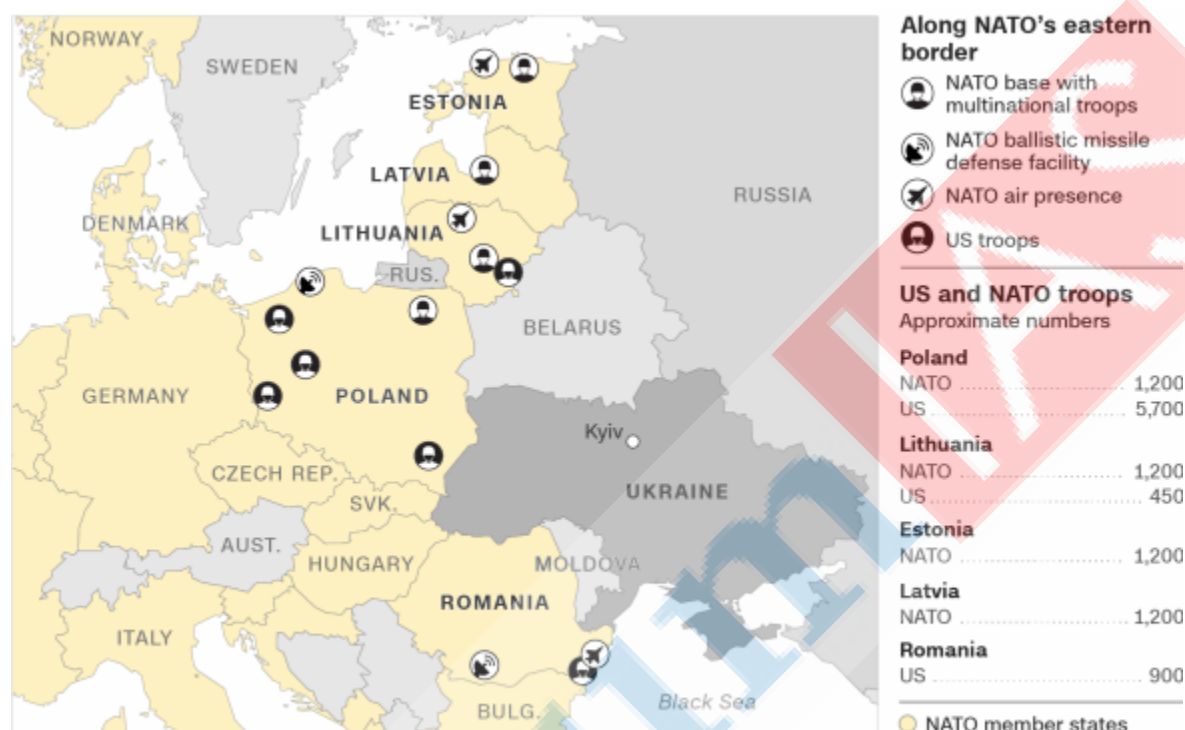
Assurance by NATO members: The leaders of Western powers had assured Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s that NATO would not expand into the East. On the contrary, it has kept expanding, and now has 30 member states in the place of the original 12.



Map excludes NATO members the United States and Canada
Source: Nato

Source: *The Guardian*

Global Conflicts: Prof. John Mearsheimer, a US foreign policy expert has noted that the eastward expansion of NATO is the reason for Russian aggression. There has been deployment of military equipment in the newly inducted NATO countries in the vicinity of Russia. There is presence of NATO and US troops in former Soviet States like Lithuania, Estonia etc. The Russian government was concerned about its security and did an invasion to protect its interest.



Note: This graphic shows forces focused on the defense of member states in NATO's east along with US Army troops in the same countries; it excludes military capabilities of individual member states. Troop numbers are approximate, latest available as of February 9, 2022. The US Army has small numbers of liaisons and advisors in Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, and Hungary.

Source: CNN

Destruction and Failure of NATO: NATO's involvement in Kosovo is well known. Over 500 civilians lost their lives due to NATO's indiscriminate bombing in the Kosovo campaign.

The Afghan war, according to the Costs of War Project led by Brown University, saw 1,76,000 deaths between 2001 and 2019. Similarly, the US-led intervention in Iraq resulted in over 1.5 lakh deaths from March 2003 to 2010 — 80% of them civilians.

These numbers do not include indirect deaths nor do they reveal the havoc wreaked by forced migration, loss of property, psychological damage or geopolitical instability.

Funds for Social Development: Expenditure towards NATO activities diverts funds from vital programmes that could otherwise be deployed to improve the lives and livelihood of the people.

What lies ahead?

First, Some experts suggest that the States of the Global South should be opposed to the very idea of such a military alliance as it distorts the level-playing field at the international level where every nation state is supposed to be equal.

Second, NATO members **should engage with Russia or else be prepared to witness another military alliance** in opposition to the NATO being formed by Russia-China and allies nexus.

Prof. Mearsheimer had advocated that NATO/US should shift their policy to recognize Ukraine as a Buffer State between Russia and NATO, rather than attempt to absorb Ukraine into NATO.

Conclusion

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is rooted in the expansionary logic of the military alliance. All the Warsaw Pact allies except Russia are now NATO members or in the process of becoming NATO members. This peculiar situation has enhanced apprehension of Russia and its allies that can eventually lead to more conflicts in future. Thus time is ideal to ask questions about NATO's role in global security.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

[Yojana April Summary] Fintech Revolution – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

India's Fintech sector has evolved at a remarkable pace in the past decade, and at present, India is in the middle of the Fintech Revolution. The once fully cash-dependant Indian economy has been transformed by the convenience and efficiency of digital services. As India moves ahead into the tech-decade —'techade', that is inclusive of technologies, innovation ecosystem, human-centricity, and progressive policies, it will establish **India's fintech revolution** for the world. Today, India is anchoring itself as a global hub for technology and innovation in the digital economy. In just two decades, the evolution of India's fintech ecosystem has been extraordinary, and the outlook for the future is promising.

What is the meaning of Financial technology or Fintech?

Financial technologies (Fintech) include new technologies that seek to improve and automate the delivery and use of financial services.

Utility: To help companies, business owners and consumers better manage their financial operations, processes, and lives by utilizing specialized software and algorithms that are used on computers and smartphones.

Coverage: Fintech includes various sectors and industries such as education, retail banking, fundraising and nonprofit, and investment management, etc. Notably, Fintech also includes the development and use of crypto-currencies such as bitcoin.

What is the status of India's fintech revolution?



Source: Yojana

India's fintech revolution is at a population scale, exceeding those of most countries globally. For instance,

- **BHIM UPI** clocked over 3.2 billion transactions in July 2021, marking a game-changing penetration of digital payments in India. Similarly, **UMANG App** has witnessed cumulative 1.7 billion transactions.

- India is the **3rd largest FinTech ecosystem**. Further, India has **the highest Fintech adoption rate** globally (87%).

- India is amongst **the fastest growing Fintech markets** in the world. Of the 2,100+ FinTechs existing in India today, over 67% have been set up in the last 5 years.

- The Fintech sector has 1,860 startups. As of December 2021, India has over 17 Fintech companies, which have gained 'Unicorn Status' with a valuation of over US\$ 1 billion. A few important ones include Acko, Bharatpe, Mobikwik, etc.

- India is ahead of the US, UK and China combined when it comes to real-time online transactions, with 25.5 billion real-time payments recorded in 2020.

Overall, digital payments have grown 160x in India since 2003, and by 2025 Fintech sector is expected to add 26 lakh jobs and Rs 2.8 lakh crores in economic value.

Read more: [PM highlights importance of fintech, warns against covid](#)

Phases of India's Fintech Revolution

Digital Payments 1.0 (Prior to 2010s): This was a period defined by the shift from cash to e-transfers. Cards and Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) were the most popular means of payment.

By 2010, all digital payments combined saw an over 2x increase that was primarily driven by business transactions.

Limitations: a) Digital payments were limited to premium retail and B2B segments, b) lack of education for individual customers, and c) mobile and internet penetration was still in their early stages.

Note: RTGS was introduced around the year 2003-04 and recorded only 100 transactions in that year.

Digital Payments 2.0 (Between 2011-2016): This is the **indicative phase** of Indian consumers' ability to respond to the innovations in banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI).

During this period, the focus invariably shifted to the use of digital payments by individual consumers, and mobile banking. Credit and debit cards, new mobile banking applications, and greater digital transformation for the front, back and middle offices were witnessed enormous growth.

By 2013, digital wallets alone registered 3.3 crore transactions, and by 2016, mobile transactions overall grew 10x.

Digital Payments 3.0 (After 2016): With the demonetisation in late 2016, 86% of all cash in India was withdrawn from circulation. This disruption acted as a catalyst for further evolution.

This phase can be best described with technology and ecosystem advancement converging to push the next stage of exponential growth.

During this era, India started exporting fintech solutions, rural internet use outgrew urban usage, there was a record-high number of Person-to-Merchant (P2M) transactions, and fintech entered the mobile-commerce age. Hence, this phase is also called as **'network effect' era**.

Upcoming phase, Digital Payments 4.0: This phase will focus on reaching the masses with low-cost solutions. In India, the volume of digital payments is expected to reach 54,800 crores by 2025, a 16x rise in just five years (since 2020). This will be driven by growth in digital commerce, personalised solutions, digital convergence, and regulatory innovation.

Read more: [The new fintech department of RBI has its work cut out](#)

What are the contributing factors for India's Fintech revolution?

(1) Surge in e-commerce and smartphone penetration; (2) **Integrated ecosystem:** All participants such as government agencies, financial and research institutions, and technology experts discussed the ideas and turn the market's latent potential of fintech for business and economic growth; (3) **Indian innovations:** The **Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) through a PIN or OTP** has been recognised globally as an Indian innovation responsible for relatively lowering the incidence of fraud; (4) **Government's philosophy of inclusion and innovation:** The Government policies and regulations in the Fintech sector have followed the philosophy of inclusion and innovation. These include, (a) [Jan-Dhan Yojana](#): The world's largest

financial inclusion initiative; (b) **e-RUPI**: for cashless payments; (c) **India Stack**: Public digital infrastructure based on open APIs; (d) **FASTag**: Online toll collection; (e) **International Financial Services Centre Authority (IFSCA)**: – In the Union Budget 2021-22 the government has announced its support for the development of a world-class Fintech Hub at the **GIFT – IFSC**; (f) **Multiple initiatives for financial literacy**: Such as the government's **National Centre for Financial Education** and **RBI's Centre for Financial Literacy project**; (g) **Infinity Forum**: The forum will focus on how technology and innovation can be leveraged by the FinTech industry.

Read more: [Union Minister Flags Off NITI Aayog's Fintech Open Summit](#)

What are the challenges faced by the Fintech firms?

The threat of Data security: Data is the backbone of FinTech. Automation of processes and digitization of data make fintech systems vulnerable to attacks from hackers.

Data Privacy Issue: The most important questions for consumers pertain to the misuse of personal information and important financial data.

Challenges in regulation: The Fintech sector covers a wide diversity of offerings. Hence, it is difficult to formulate a single and comprehensive approach to regulate the entire Fintech sector. For this reason, In most countries, they are unregulated and have **become fertile ground for scams and frauds**.

Industry-Related Complexities: Fintechs are designed to work with a sophisticated working model. This makes it difficult for them to maintain a smooth relationship with other financial institutions like banks. Banks, on the other hand, have fear working with Fintechs as they are risking reputation loss.

Other challenges: (a) Despite immense scope for innovation, **cross-border payments are still uncharted territory** for FinTechs; (b) **Inequality of access** to FinTech services.

Read more: [Atal Innovation Mission concludes first fintech cohort of 'AIM-iLEAP'](#)

What can be done to facilitate the Fintech revolution further?

Implementing the recommendations of the steering committee: The Government of India has constituted a steering committee on fintech-related issues. The committee submitted its report in 2019. Few major recommendations include,

-Framing a **comprehensive legal framework for consumer protection** as there is a rise of fintech and digital services.

-**Adopting regulation technology (or RegTech)** by all financial-sector regulators for making compliance with regulations easier, quicker, and effective.

Policy support in the area of data security and fraud management: The use of new technologies like Blockchain, geo-fencing or geotagging, or the implementation of a framework to prevent QR-code-based phishing attacks can be a step forward in ensuring a secure and stable digital financial ecosystem.

Greater customer awareness: Awareness should be created, and digital literacy must be improved to understand and analyse the pros and cons of fintech services. It will help customers to make informed choices.

Protect the data: With rising fintech platforms, there is a requirement for a strong data protection framework in India. The government must **pass the personal data protection bill** to protect the data.

Promote further financial inclusion: India needs to continue building the payments infrastructure and facilitate offline payments, inclusive for cities that fall into the categories Tier 3 and below.

Other reforms: These include **a) Simplify the KYC policy for merchants and customers, b) Creating a coordinated response** to facilitate a high degree of interoperability amongst startups and **c) Catering to market demand and changing attitudes in the Fintech space.**

Read more: [India and UN-Based Better Than Cash Alliance organizes learning on fintech solutions](#)

In the last seven and half decades, India has made a tremendous leap to become a robust digital economy. Winning the **techade**, India must build on its digital advantage and pivot towards a more data-driven structure of governance to create a more inclusive, sustainable, and impact-led innovation in the Fintech sector.

National Medical Register : Advantages and Challenges – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

With the [National Medical Commission \(NMC\)](#) planning to soon switch over to a licentiate test after MBBS, the NMC has released draft guidelines on how the doctors will be registered in order to practice medicine. The NMC put out a set of three draft regulations on the registration of doctors to the National Medical Register. The guidelines aim to bring uniformity to the registration process of medical practitioners in India.

About the three draft guidelines and the National Medical Register

The NMC has released three future-looking draft regulations; **(1)** License to Practice Medicine, 2022; **(2)** Registration of Additional Qualifications, 2022; and **(3)** Temporary Registration of Foreign Medical Practitioner to Practice Medicine in India.

These regulations together stipulate the process of registration of doctors in the National Medical Register.

The guidelines provide a framework for **creating a dynamic National Medical Register**, with a **unique ID** assigned to each student who qualifies NEET. The professional qualifications such as post-graduation and super-speciality training will be added to the same ID.

Eligibility for Indian Medical Graduates for getting registration: They have to: **(a)** Complete their MBBS degree from a recognised college; **(b)** Finish their mandatory 12-month long internship; and **(c)** Pass the yet-to-be-implemented licentiate exam called National Exit Test (NExT) for getting their registration.

Eligibility for Foreign medical graduates for getting registration: They have to: **(a)** Complete their MBBS-equivalent degree from a medical institute “recognised and listed by the NMC” in other countries, **(b)** Be registerable as a medical practitioner in the said country, **(c)** Complete a 12-month internship in India and d) pass the same NExT exam.

The draft guidelines also state, “All licenced practitioners are obliged to inform and update their data in the National Register such as Additional Qualifications, Contact Details, and Place of Practice / Employment as soon as changes occur.”

Read more: [Structural and practical limitations of Indian medical education system](#)

What is NExT?

The National Exit Test is a proposed examination for granting a license and registration for practising medicine in India. It is similar to the USMLE (the United States Medical Licensing Examination) for those wishing to practice in the US.

The exam will act as a country-wide standardised test for passing MBBS, for granting of the license, as well as a qualification test for post-graduation courses instead of the current NEET-PG that students have to sit for after they have completed their MBBS and a one-year internship.

It will be a theory paper, like MBBS finals or NEET PG test. Instead, It will be held in two parts – one written and one practical exam where the students will be judged on their clinical acumen. Students will have to appear for the first NExT test after completion of MBBS and the second one after completion of the internship.

According to the present draft, till the NExT is introduced, the current processes will continue. The government expects to conduct the NExT from 2024.

Must read: [National Entrance cum Eligibility Test \(NEET\) – Issues and Significance- Explained, pointwise](#)

About the present National Medical Register

At present, all doctors have to register with their respective State Medical Councils, without which they cannot practice medicine. Every state maintains its own medical register, which is then sent to NMC for a consolidated country-wide register.

However, the draft regulation seeks to create a dynamic and regularly updated register.

Read more: [What ails medical education in India](#)

What are the advantages of the National Medical Register?

Open registration to foreign doctors: The guidelines open the registration to foreign doctors who want to come to India to study in post-graduation courses, fellowships, clinical research, or voluntary clinical services.

Facilitate the arrival of foreign experts: The guidelines will solve the lacunae of foreign experts being granted “permission” by the Health Ministry.

Instead, the NMC will now grant temporary registration to such doctors that will end with the duration of the programme. The maximum duration of such a temporary registration will be 12 months.

Check errors in registration: The present registration by State Medical Councils usually has to be updated every five years. This leaves a lot of room for duplication of names in different states, and doctors who have retired or died remaining on the register for years.

For instance, A medical graduate in New Delhi has given a NOC for registration in the other state, if he wants to move between the five-year duration. This results in duplication of data.

Read more: [Salient provisions of National Medical Bill, 2019](#)

Creates a level playing field for Domestic and Foreign medical students: At present, students who complete their MBBS and pass the final exam of their university are eligible to get their license without any such licentiate test.

On the other hand, foreign medical graduates have to pass the screening test conducted by the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences to get themselves registered in India. With this policy, both domestic and foreign medical students have to undergo the same NExT.

Benefits of unique ID: Once a unique ID is created, the portal will be thrown open to all recognised institutes in India who can upload all verified documents of their students to it. This will make the registration process easier, as the state medical councils currently have to get all the documents submitted by those wishing to register from the medical institutes by post before adding the name.

Read more: [What the plight of students in Ukraine reveals about medical education in India](#)

What are the challenges associated with the draft guidelines?

Silent on internship: The students who study medicine in foreign has to complete a year-long internship in the country of their study and come back and do another year-long internship in India. The new guidelines do not specify this.

Onus on the doctors: The draft guidelines also put an onus on the doctors to keep updating their registration with details of additional qualifications, change in employment, contact details, or place of work “as soon as the change occurs”.

Promote Coaching Factories: The standardisation with NExT will lead to mushrooming of Coaching institutes to bridge the gap in educational Institutes. This is seen in India with NEET and similar other national tests such as the Joint Entrance Examination and Common Law Admission Test.

Dual exam for practising medicine for Indian students: There are no professional exams for Engineers, Graduates of Arts and Science to practice their respective jobs after graduation, except in certain scenarios like pursuing higher education or trying any government employment.

At present, MBBS finals have already tested the knowledge of MBBS aspirants. Making NExT mandatory will create a dual exam (MBBS finals and NExT) for practising medicine.

Read more: [Medical Education in India and Associated Issues – Explained, pointwise](#)

What should be done?

Make clear guidelines for internship: Before implementing the guidelines, the NMC has to make a clear set of rules for the internship of medical graduates from foreign Universities.

Preparing a list of Foreign Universities: At present, the NMC does not have a list of recognised foreign medical institutes. At present, the NMC have a set of minimum requirements, such as a 54-month-long course or medium of teaching being English, which is an institute follows, their degrees are recognised in India.

But to facilitate the arrival of foreign experts, the NMC must prepare a list of recognised foreign universities.

Implement other reforms essential reforms: With restructured medical licensing systems, the NMC has to focus on other reforms such as ranking medical colleges, and standardizing entry requirements at medical schools across the country are all essential reforms under the NMC.

Address the skewed societal trend: India needs to **address the irrational high social value placed on medical and engineering college education** across India. This will reduce the hyper-competitiveness and higher failure rate in tests such as NEET, and Joint Entrance Examination.

Read more: [Landmark decision taken by Government of India in Medical Education](#)

With a consolidated national register and unique ID, there will be no duplication of data. Further, the data will be updated more frequently, resulting in a comprehensive database of doctors in India, including details on all their education and training in one place. This database can then be shared with state governments or other health programmes, which are looking to hire doctors.

Sources: The Indian Express ([Article 1](#), [Article 2](#))

Food Systems and Climate Change: Impacts and Mitigation Methods- Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The FAO's latest data show that food prices are at a historical high. Globally, the average food prices in 2021 were the highest in 46 years. Part of the price rise can be attributed to geopolitical reasons, but a great deal is due to the impact of climate change on food systems. Food production faces significant challenges from rising temperatures. Food production and prices have grown increasingly volatile in recent times. Extreme events of climate change have major impacts on food productivity, supply and prices. To avert this, the world needs to develop adaptations that can protect both farmers and consumers.

What are the impacts of climate change on food systems?



Source: TOI

Drop-in yields: Traditional staples, like rice and wheat, are witnessing a drop in yields as temperatures increase.

Narrowing food basket: Climate change will also impact the productivity of perishable products. Hence, the overall diversity of the food system will be affected. The food basket might get narrower. Crops like vegetables won't be able to sustain themselves without more irrigation, which will then affect water supplies.



Source: TOI

Increase in droughts and floods: Climate change will also bring an increased incidence of droughts and floods. ‘Once in a decade’ droughts are happening 70% more often.

Nutritional insecurity due to rising CO₂ concentrations: Rising CO₂ levels in the atmosphere are reducing key nutrients in staple crops like wheat and rice. Hence, there is a risk of micronutrient deficiencies in many countries, particularly in India. For instance, by mid-century, there could be reductions of five to 15% in iron, zinc and protein within the rice, wheat, maize and soy. These decreases could push 200 million people into new risks of nutrient deficiency while exacerbating existing deficiencies in one billion people.

In India, about 15 million people would be at new risk of zinc deficiency, **causing a significant public health problem.**

Note: ***Zinc** is important for immune systems — populations deficient in it have higher rates of mortality from infectious diseases, which particularly impact children.*

***Iron** is also extremely important — people with fewer levels of iron tend to suffer from anaemia, higher maternal and infant mortality, lower work capacity, reduced IQs and stunting in children*

Reduction in pollinators: Reduction in population of pollinators has reduced the yield and production of certain fruits and vegetables. These fruits and vegetables are crucial in prevention of heart diseases and cancer. Researchers have found that around half a million lives are lost annually because of this. The impact is more on Eastern Europe, parts of the former Soviet Republic and middle-income nations



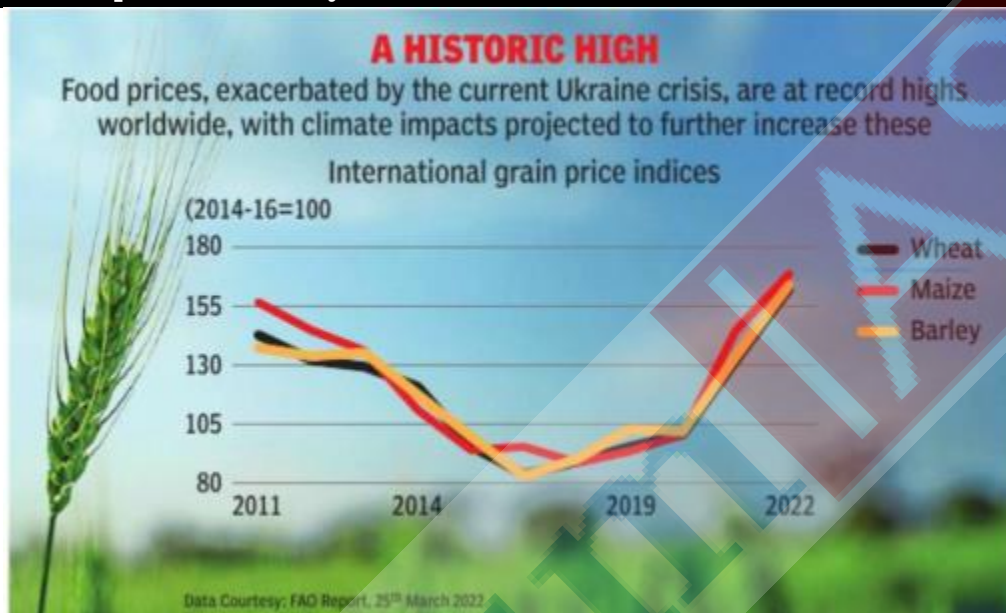
Source: TOI

Issues with Chemical fertilizers: The farming of genetically modified varieties relies on fossil fuel based products like chemical fertilisers — these are made by burning fossil fuels at very high temperatures. This gives ammonium nitrate used for explosives and urea. One kilogram of urea thus requires two litres of diesel. Chemical fertilisers also emit carbon dioxide and even more damaging nitrous oxide.

The World Economic Forum finds, that even in 2007, 30% of annual fluctuations in crops were due to weather changes.

Read more: [Need to make agri-food systems resilient to address food security: SOFA 2021](#)

What are the Impacts of Food Systems on Environment?



Source: TOI

The food production systems are also one of the largest drivers of environmental change, biodiversity loss and climate change. The World Bank estimates the environmental and human health costs of such food systems amount to US\$ 12 trillion annually. Further, the food systems are removing the ecosystems which create food insecurity.

According to IPCC, world's current food systems are intensely reliant on deforestation, monocultures and chemicals, and create a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions. The IPCC also predicts half of the world's habitable land is used for agriculture, with over three-quarters given to livestock and animal feed.

Industrial agriculture uses 70% of global freshwater and causes 78% of eutrophication or the pollution of waterways with chemicals. Around 24,000 species are threatened by agriculture.

However, to feed a growing global population, food production must increase by 50% by 2030. So there is an urgent need to adjust the present food systems.

Read more: [Food security policy formulation: What can India learn from other countries?](#)

Vulnerability of India's food system to Impacts of Climate Change

India is one of the most vulnerable countries to rising temperatures. India has genetically modified agriculture and Green Revolution crops alongside indigenous systems which value agroforestry and biodiversity.




The entire Indo-Gangetic plain from Punjab to Bengal is known as the main rice and wheat belt of the country. Many places within this belt, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal; are also the areas of high rural poverty.

As temperatures rise, India might witness declining productivity across this belt, and the people most affected will be the small and marginal farmers in eastern India. The significant impacts on their income will affect their food security.

More prosperous regions, like Punjab and Haryana, will likely see lower productivity. Overall, this could result in a drop in food supplies in the market and in procurement for the public distribution system. This will again impact the poorest consumers who depend on the PDS for food.

Read more: [Biofortified food can lead India from food security to nutrition security](#)

What should be done to adjust the food systems?

- The highest emissions are caused by animal products but sweets can leave an aftertaste as well – **1 kg of chocolate produces 19 kgs of greenhouse gases (GHGs)** driving global warming and climate change 
- Scientists find **1 kg rice generates upto 4 GHG** while wheat, which needs a high application of **chemical fertilisers**, can emit upto 200 kgs of CO₂ per tonne produced 
- **Locally grown fruits and vegetables have the lowest carbon footprint on Earth** – 1 kg of apples causes only 0.4 GHG, 1 kg of bananas causes 0.7 GHG while 1 kg of tomatoes causes 1.4 GHG 

Source: TOI

Explore adjusting cropping systems: In areas where significant amounts of rice and wheat are grown at low productivity levels, India could explore growing crops that are more adaptable to higher temperatures. For instance, crops like millets will adjust better to global warming since they grow in harsher conditions.

Revive India's ancient food and farming wisdom: India's forgotten indigenous systems are vital in the era of climate disasters. India should revive organic farming methods, privilege biodiversity over mono-cultures and use climate-resilient and nutritionally dense seeds.

Promote sustainable aquaculture, and precision agriculture: These methods show great promise in reducing inputs like water and fertilisers and regenerative practices which encourage pollinators to return. This includes increasing residue incorporation in farming, placing straw back into the soil, agroforestry, etc.

Collaborative approach: The **public sector** will have to play a large role in **supporting the best technologies and management practices**.

The **private sector** can also play a big role by **bringing in new technologies** like affordable solar panels and efficient small-scale irrigation systems which give more output per drop of water.

Consumers should be Climate conscious: Consumers should seek foods that have minimal impacts on the environment, consuming sustainable dairy and livestock products that don't aggravate methane emissions.

The more consumers seek resilient foods, the more they can help to establish timely measures that can most efficiently manage the impacts of climate change.

Innovative measures: The IPCC calculates that sustainable farming and agroforestry could mitigate one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. For instance, in Colombia, farmers practising silvopasture (combining trees with pasturelands) have already found increased carbon sequestration and higher crop productivity.

Similarly, there is a protein revolution underway with plant-based meat products or fermentation, which can produce synthetic proteins like milk. These can disconnect protein production from animal livestock.

Encourage more diverse diets: India has subsidies for refined grains like rice and wheat. Subsidising traditional grains like millets, amaranth, etc. could strengthen nutrition and climate adaptation.

Read more: [Food security in India and its challenges- Explained, pointwise](#)

There are abundant number of solutions before humanity. Now the world needs to mobilise them to get better yield and far more sustainable results.

[Yojana April Summary] About Jal Jeevan Mission: Accelerating Socio-Economic Development – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

In recent years, the Government has taken a number of steps to improve the quality of life and enhance the ease of living of people. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to make the tap water connection to every household and public institution.

What is the need for Jal Jeevan Mission?

(1) Access to clean water reduces the burden of water-borne diseases; (2) Prerequisite to ensure improved sanitation and hygiene, leading to an overall improvement in public health; (3) Relieves women and young girls from the age-old drudgery of fetching water from a distance. It gives them the time to pursue education or vocation of their choice; (4) Ensure that water does not become a limiting factor in India's rapid socio-economic development and quest for high economic growth to eliminate poverty.

Read more: [Jal Jeevan Mission: Flowing in the right direction](#)

About the Jal Jeevan Mission

Launched by: Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019.

Objective: The aim is to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.

The goal of the mission: The goal is to have 'Har Ghar Jal'- every house in the village is to be provided with a Functional tap connection.

Key Features of the mission



Source: JJM

Firstly, the mission is a decentralized, demand-driven and community-managed programme. The Gram Panchayat will play a key role in planning and implementation.

Secondly, the mission includes extensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) as a key component of the mission.

Thirdly, the mission will also implement source sustainability measures as mandatory elements. This includes measures such as recharge and reuses through greywater management, water conservation, and rainwater harvesting.

Fourthly, it prescribes a 'bottoms-up' five-year village action plan through the formation of a village water and sanitation committee (VWSCs) or Pani Samiti, under the gram panchayat.

Further, States will give priority to, (1) Water quality-affected areas; (2) Villages in drought-prone and desert areas; (3) Scheduled caste/scheduled tribe majority villages; (4) Aspirational districts and Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana villages.

Read more: [NAL SE JAL SCHEME](#)

Jal Jeevan Mission Urban

The **JJM (Urban)** has been designed to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal- 6. The mission also provides coverage of sewerage/septage management in 500 AMRUT cities is the other focus area.

Read more: [Jal Jeevan Mission launches innovation challenge for portable water testing devices](#)

What have been the achievements of JJM so far?

At the time of the announcement of the JJM, out of a total of 18.70 crore rural households, **only 3.23 crore (17%) households had the provision of tap water supply**. At present, there are 19.32 crore rural households across 21 different edapho-climatic conditions in the country. Currently, about **9 crores (46%) of rural households in the country have assured provision of a clean tap water supply**. Every rural household in 101 districts and 1.40 lakh villages is getting a clean tap water supply.

Three States, viz. Goa, Haryana, Telangana, and three UTs, viz. Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Daman & Diu, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Puducherry have become '*Har Ghar Jal*' States/UTs.

Read more: [Puducherry becomes 'Har Ghar Jal' UT under "Jal Jeevan Mission"](#)

What strategies have been adopted by JJM to achieve this remarkable feat?

The community at the Centre: JJM is a decentralised, demand-driven, and community-managed programme it also aims to **instil a 'sense of ownership'** among the local community.

Implementation strategy: Acknowledging the urgency to ensure potable tap water supply in difficult areas, priority has been accorded to water quality-affected habitations such as villages falling in drought-prone & desert areas, Aspirational Districts, SC/ST majority villages and [Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana \(SAGY\)](#) Villages.

Under JJM, every State/UT prepared a 'saturation plan' to achieve 100% coverage or 'Har Ghar Jal' status.

Partnerships & Capacity Building: In line with the motto of Jal Jeevan Mission, i.e., 'Building partnerships, Changing lives', 185 organisations, viz. UN agencies, trusts, foundations, etc, have been roped in as Sector Partners to dovetail their resources and efforts in achieving the collective goal of *Har Ghar Jal*. Further, About 14 thousand local NGOs, VOs, CBOs, women SHGs, etc., are also engaged by States as Implementation Support Agencies (ISAs) for VWSCs.

Water Quality Monitoring & Surveillance: About 10 lakh women have been trained across villages with an emphasis on ensuring water quality. Laboratories are being standardised and upgraded across the country. More than 2,000 water quality testing laboratories have been opened.

Innovation and Use of Modern technologies: Sensor-based IoT pilots are underway in more than 100 villages for automatic data capturing to measure and monitor the daily water supply.

Water Quality Management Information System (WQMIS) has been developed by using the reports generated from water quality testing through Field Testing Kits as well as laboratories.

Read more: [Grand ICT Challenge under Jal Jeevan Mission](#)

What are the challenges associated with Jal Jeevan Mission?

Geographical diversity: In India, conditions vary from cold to hot desert, Indo-Gangetic plains to mountains, vast alluvial mainland to forested areas, more than 7,000 km long coastal belt to many islands. Each such region has its own unique challenges.

Fluctuation in the rainfall pattern: Western Rajasthan receives 100 mm rainfall per year, on the other hand, Mawsynram in North East receives 11,000 mm annual rainfall.

Overexploitation of groundwater: India has the highest groundwater consumption in the world with about 10 abstraction structures every km, which indicates the over-exploitation of groundwater sources.

As per the Central Ground Water Board report, 2017, about 50% of groundwater sources either have quality or quantity issues, which means simple in situ water supply systems based on groundwater may not work on a long-term basis in half of the country.

Creation of water supply infrastructure: To ensure clean tap water supply to 83% of rural households on a long-term basis, huge amount of **water supply infrastructure** has to be created. The scale of the work is so huge that the number of tap water connections provided every year will have to be equivalent to the total number of taps provided accumulatively in the last 70 years.

Read more: [Clean drinking water to all: Initiatives and challenges – Explained Pointwise](#)

What should be done to improve the performance of JJM?

The government has to **set up further robust institutions** such as regulatory bodies, certification provisions, and learning opportunities for engineers.

Adopt innovative technologies: The government need to adopt innovative technologies, especially sewage treatment, in-situ combustion/energy production from human excreta, etc. This will reduce the consumption of freshwater to flush tanks, often seen in urban areas.

With the massive **deployment of sensor-based IoT systems** for measurement & monitoring of water supply, testing of water samples for quality and dashboard for data integration and analysis will ensure transparency, assured service delivery, and grievance redressal.

Water Security for Development: India should work on groundwater replenishing methods without polluting the sources. Further, village communities and users/owners should start water budgeting to understand and improve water-use efficiency by changing water usage patterns, shifting to less water-consuming crops, and/ or switching to micro-irrigation, i.e., drip and sprinkler systems.

Even a small reduction in agricultural use will enhance water availability for drinking and domestic purposes, enhancing the longevity and functionality of water supply systems.

Convergence with other schemes: To ensure the long-term sustainability of JJM, the mission has to converge with other schemes such as [MGNREGS](#), [Atal Bhujal Yojana](#), [Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana](#), etc., to dovetail resources at the village level.

With the progress of JJM, SBM, India became a shining example on a global platform for its impactful WASH policies that are being driven on such a large scale while building a movement of behavioural change. India is now certainly in a position to transfer/make available the knowledge/experience to other countries, especially the global south.

Hindi as a Common Language: Constitutional Provisions, Challenges and Suggestions – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Recently, the Union Home Minister presided over the [37th meeting of the Parliamentary Official Language Committee](#). During the meeting, the Home Minister said that people of different states should communicate with each other in Hindi, and not English. He also said that the time has come to make the Official Language an important part of the unity of the country, i.e., Hindi as a Common Language for the country.

In 2019, on the occasion of Hindi Diwas, he had pushed for the idea of “**One Nation, One Language**”. He had said, “India is a country of different languages. Every language has its own importance. But it is absolutely essential that the entire country has one language that becomes the identity of the nation”. He also said, “If there is any language that can tie the whole country in one thread, it is the most spoken language of Hindi.”

Apart from his remarks, recently the Government of India provided that Hindi would be made compulsory up to Class 10 in the eight northeastern states. This resulted in protests from various organisations in the Northeast. Also, several South Indian states have criticised the decision of the Union Government.

About the Home Minister’s remark in the Parliamentary Official Language Committee During the meeting, Home Minister said that,

- Hindi should be accepted as an alternative to English and not to local languages. On the other hand, Hindi should be made more flexible by accepting words from other local languages.
- Elementary knowledge of Hindi should be given to students up to Class 9 and pay more attention to Hindi teaching examinations.
- India should republish the Hindi dictionary by revising it.
- According to MHA, currently, 70% of the agenda of the Cabinet is prepared in Hindi.
- Nine tribal communities of the North East have converted their dialects’ scripts to Devanagari. Further, 22,000 Hindi teachers have been recruited in the eight states of the Northeast.

Read more: [A language ladder for an education roadblock](#)

About the India’s Common Language Policy

Ideally, every Central government document should be in every one of India’s languages. But it is not possible in practice due to large number of languages (23 versions; 22 in vernacular and 1 in English).

The debate over India’s official language has a harsh history, it triggered violent protests in the 1960s. The language war was finally settled in favour of accommodation of different languages as against the dominance of Hindi.

Hence, India has chosen to have two official languages, English and Hindi. State governments complement these by producing official material in the language of their States.

Read more: [“Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India” \(SPPEL\) to promote all Indian Languages including endangered languages](#)

What are the Constitutional Provisions Related to Hindi?

Article 343: According to this Article, the official language of the Union of India is to be Hindi in Devnagari script, and numerals should follow the international form of Indian numerals. The Article also states that English will continue to be used as an official language for 15 years from the commencement of the Constitution.

Note: The Article also made provisions for the continuation of English even after 25th January 1965 by empowering the Parliament to make laws to that effect. Accordingly, the Official Languages Act, 1963 was passed which provided for the continued use of English even after the said date in 1965.

Article 346: This article is about the official language for communication between the States and between a State and the Union. The Article states that the “authorised” language will be used for official communication. However, if two or more states agree that their communications shall be in Hindi, then Hindi may be used.

Article 347: This Article gives power to the President to recognise a language as an official language of a given State. But this can be done if the President is satisfied that a substantial proportion of that State desires that the language be recognised. Such recognition can be for a part of the State or the whole state.

Article 351: This Article gives power to the Union Government to issue a directive for the development of the Hindi language.

Read more: [NEP 2020 and language policy](#)

What steps have been taken recently to promote Hindi as a Common Language?

The recent steps taken by the Government to promote Hindi include, **(a) Hindi names on Central Government programmes and schemes:** For instance, *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, *Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana*, and others; **(b)** A Parliamentary Committee also proposed to make the use of Hindi mandatory for MPs and Union Ministers; **(c)** The government made Hindi a compulsory subject for the Central Board of Secondary Education schools across the country; **(d)** The Central Government issuing media advertisements in Hindi; **(e)** The government launched ‘promotional campaigns exclusively in the Hindi script’; and **(f)** The government also renamed the well-known occasions or festivities in Hindi or Sanskrit, such as Teacher’s Day as *Guru Purnima*.

Read more: [“3 Language Policy” is not applicable to the Central govt. offices](#)

What are the challenges in promoting Hindi as a Common Language?

Vulnerability of local languages: Each language has vocabulary, gender rules and locutions that do not come instinctively to everyone. When the government uses Hindi as a common language, it will not be easy to understand the government’s policies, decisions and position to non-Hindi speakers.

Challenges to the bureaucracy: The government’s decision to make Hindi an official language might hamper the efficiency of the Indian Bureaucracy. For instance, there might be a situation where a bureaucrat from Kerala state in Delhi has to read and write file notations in Hindi and has to submit them to a superior officer belonging to Odisha state.

Failure of the Three language formula: In the five decades since the promulgation of the ‘three-language formula’, implementation has largely failed across the country. This is for two reasons; **(a)** Anti-Hindi agitations in various states, such as Tamil Nadu; **(b)** There is no demand for

learning a Southern or North-Eastern Language in states that demand Hindi as an official language.

Read more: [Endangered Languages in India – Explained, pointwise](#)

Against Constitutional ideas: The Constitution envisages India as a Union of States working within a federal framework. Further, in India, most of the States have been formed on a linguistic basis. So, promoting Hindi will go against these ideas and aspirations and violate constitutional provisions, such as,

– **[Eighth Schedule to the Constitution](#):** The Eight Schedule consists of the 22 languages. Of these languages, 14 were initially included in the Constitution.

– **Article 350A:** This article facilitates for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage.

– **Article 350B:** This Article provides for the establishment of a Special Officer for linguistic minorities and safeguards their identity.

Creates discrimination in the long run: The government's move to make Hindi as a common language might provide Hindi speakers with the economic, academic and administrative edge and let them control non-Hindi speaking regions of the country in the long run.

Read more: [Bhashas & Bharat: The current language policy is wise, born out of pragmatism. We can't afford linguistic extremism](#)

What should be done instead of promoting Hindi as a Common Language?

As recommended by a Member of Parliament:

Use dual solutions: Language is a vehicle, not a destination. So, the government can use Hindi where ever it is understood. On the other hand, the government should use English everywhere, since it places all Indians from all parts of our country at an equal disadvantage.

India is not a 'one language, one religion, one nation': The debate over India's official language has settled after many problems. India is a diverse country and its languages are all equally authentic. The government should use the Language as an instrument of opportunity.

So far, the language policy is proven to be successful in a country that speaks in many tongues. Hence, there is no good reason to disturb the settlement that was arrived at after a tortuous process.

Protect India's famous Linguistic sub-nationalism: Many Indian states are home to sub-nationalism imagined around a regional language. This is even recognised in the All India Congress Committee at its Nagpur session in 1920 itself.

Most of the Indian languages are older than Hindi and over the years, many states have made significant strides toward making their local language the medium of official communication and governance.

Proper implementation of the Three Language formula: Instead of making Hindi a common language, The government should address the hindrances of the three-language formula advocated in the [National Education Policy \(NEP 2020\)](#).

Encourage Translations: There should be a lot more investment in translations of the works of one language into other languages. Translations will enrich Indian languages.

Read more: [One year of National Education Policy – Explained, pointwise](#)

Linguistic extremism can be avoided by ensuring that it does not become a political project or the issue should not be politicized. India being a federal polity, both centre and states should follow cooperative models and avoid language jingoism respect for Unity in the diversity of India.

India US 2+2 Dialogue and the Dynamics of India-US relations – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The virtual meeting between the Indian Prime Minister and US President hours before the fourth [India-US 2+2 dialogue](#) reiterated the importance of the overall strategic partnership. The world's two largest democracies ought to be natural partners in upholding the global order. The dialogue is significant because of the recent differences on the Ukraine war and trade with Russia. The India-US 2+2 dialogue ranged from situational awareness in space to deep underwater domain awareness, with cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, counter-drone technology, stepped-up military engagements, exercises and logistics.

What are the key outcomes of the recent India-US 2+2 dialogue?

Defence cooperation: India stressed the need for co-development and co-production of high-tech military systems. Both countries have decided to “revitalize” the [Defence Technology and Trade Initiative \(DTTI\)](#) which was launched in 2012 but has largely failed to deliver the goods till now. Further, India wants the DTTI to transform the “buyer-seller” relationship.

Two DTTI projects specifically identified during the dialogue were counter-unmanned aerial systems (UAS) and an ISTAR (intelligence, surveillance, targeting and reconnaissance) platform. These will add to the pact inked last year to jointly develop air-launched unmanned aerial vehicles (ALUAVs).

New Space Situational Awareness (SSA) arrangement: The meeting finalised the signing of a new SSA arrangement and pledged to expand bilateral space cooperation. This will support greater information sharing and cooperation in space.

The two countries also decided to conduct their inaugural **Defence Space Dialogue** as well as AI Dialogue in 2022 to add to the existing Defence Cyber Dialogue.

Maritime collaborations: The US welcomed India's decision to join the multilateral Combined Maritime Force (CMF) based in Bahrain as an associate partner. Both countries expressed their shared interest in the Indian Ocean Region and the wider Indo-Pacific. They highlighted the underwater domain awareness, which becomes important with Chinese submarines prowling around in the region.

Artificial Intelligence: India and the US have agreed to hold a dialogue on artificial intelligence to harness opportunities for joint innovation and cooperation in new domains.

Other collaborations:

- The two nations will further increase the “scope and complexity” of their military combat exercises, as well as “deepen cooperation” between their elite Special Forces.
- The dialogue agreed to expand the scope of reciprocal military logistics.
- The US has announced that it did not make a determination to apply CAATSA sanctions on India for the purchase of Russian arms.

On Russia-Ukraine Issue: The two countries urged an immediate cessation of hostilities, and unequivocally condemned civilian deaths. The joint statement underscored that the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, respect for international law and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states.

Read more: [Dynamism in India US ties](#)

What are the other areas of cooperation between India and the US?

Both India and US **accepted China as the biggest threat** to the rules-based international order and India's territorial sovereignty. In fact, China's diplomatic support for Russia at the UN has raised suspicion that China plans to use Russia to further its strategic agenda in the Indo-Pacific once the Ukraine crisis gets over.

The recent joint **statement calling on Pakistan** to not allow its territory for terrorism shows the points of convergence are growing.

Knowledge and innovation partnership: Students, the flow of talent between two countries, highlights the knowledge partnership. The technology and business relationships promote innovation. The Indian external affairs minister called this as "the **bedrock of India-US relationship**".

Read more: [The Great Power Rivalry \(China, Russia and the US\) and its Impact on India – Explained, pointwise](#)

How does India's recent stand in Ukraine Crisis facilitate better India-US relations?

The US knew that India's ties with Russia cannot be amended overnight. This is akin to Europe's energy dependence on Russia that continues despite several EU nations promising a drawdown.

On the other hand, Russia's actions in Ukraine have not only put India in a tight spot, but also ensured that Russia will be China's junior partner for the foreseeable future.

Ever since the Ukraine crisis, India has firmly held to its position of strategic autonomy, with the aim of disassociating the politics around the conflict from the horrors of the war itself. Further, India has held a consistent line in terms of urging peaceful engagement and dialogue between Russia and Ukraine

For instance, **(a)** India unilaterally condemned the Bucha killings without assigning blame to anyone; **(b)** India has dispatched humanitarian aid to Ukraine and is preparing to do more in this regard at Ukraine; and **(c)** [India abstained from the UNGA voting to expel Russia](#) from the UNHRC. But this actually favoured the US resolution resulting in expelling Russia from UNHRC.

Hence, the US has agreed to move ahead with the broader agenda of scientific, business cooperation and towards a common stand against Chinese aggression.

Read more: [Ukraine conflict and its implications for India – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the challenges in India-US relations?

Economic challenges: **(a)** In 2020, America **withdrew special trade privileges granted to India** under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). In retaliation, India hiked the tariffs on 28 American goods, including walnut, apples, iron and steel products; **(b)** The US has complained about **India's complex customs clearance procedures** and associated delays increased costs

and uncertainty; **(c)** The US feels that **India is a high tariff country**. The US wants the tariffs reduced and a more predictable regime to conduct business.

Policy challenges: **(a) Cap on H-1B visas:** India has strongly objected the move to cap H-1B visas. India argument is that the restrictions on work visas would inhibit Indian workers to move to the US; **(b) India's E-commerce policy and data localisation:** The US has criticised data localisation and the draft e-commerce policy of India, calling it 'most discriminatory and trade-distortive'.

Other challenges: **(a)** According to the USTR report, India continues to feature on the 'Priority Watch List' for alleged Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) violations; **(b)** WTO disputes like capping the prices of medical devices by India, Demand for greater Indian market access for American agriculture and dairy products etc.

Read more: [The sanctions clouds over India US Ties](#)

What should be done to improve India-US relations?

The India US 2+2 Dialogue provides an ideal platform to enhance its cooperation with the US. The platform can be expanded to broaden the scope of cooperation.

Cooperate on Contemporary Global Issues: Both India and the US should focus on enhancing the bilateral relationship and strengthening cooperation on contemporary global issues such as terrorism, climate change and reliable chains for critical technologies.

Both sides must work together in the following areas: **(a)** Utilise the potential of the **shipbuilding industry**; **(b)** Towards entry of India into the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**; **(c)** India can play a crucial role in America's Indo-Pacific strategy, the US can help India to tackle China's assertiveness.

Experts believe **Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies** will further define relationships between countries. India should look for opportunities to use its potential and establish its 'footprint' in AI and emerging technology.

Discuss a treaty on space militarization: After the Ukraine crisis, US-Russia tensions flared up, and Russia's Roscosmos threatened to snap space relations with NASA. It has made it difficult for the US to access the International Space Station (ISS). India and US, in the long term, can explore some opportunities in this field.

Enhanced role of participation: There is a need for visionary partnership on the part of the 'Rising' and 'Middle' powers in the Asia-Pacific and the Gulf region such as India, Australia, Japan, South Korea and even countries like the UAE to fill the sudden vacuum caused by the temporary downscaling of US effort in the region. For instance, creating robust geo-economic and security partnerships with ASEAN countries.

Hence, India and US should push for collaboration among regional players in the region to contain China. At present, China is currently engaged with a resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic in the critically important Shanghai belt. This could well romp away with the region over the next few years.

Read more: [India-US ties: The scope for literal common space](#)

The current chaos in Ukraine and the South China Sea presents several opportunities for India to scale up its engagement in its near and extended neighbourhood, both on its western and eastern flanks. This strategy would support India's 'rising power' status and enhance the India-US Strategic Partnership.

At the same time, on this path, India has to balance its relations with American demands, its long-term friendship with Russia and its own strategic necessities in the neighbourhood and beyond.

Source: [The Times of India](#), [The Times of India](#), [Business Standard](#)

Retrieving Stolen Idols and Artefacts: Initiatives, Challenges and Way Forward – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Monuments and antiquities are part of India's heritage and culture. But there is a lack of adequate measures to protect this rich heritage. Hence, there are frequent incidents wherein these idols and artefacts are stolen from centrally-protected temples, museums, monuments and archaeological sites. India is facing a double jeopardy due to the illicit removal of cultural objects. The stolen idols and artefacts are irreplaceable and this inflicts a heavy loss of heritage. To protect the stolen idols and artefacts and bring them back to India, the government needs to be in a mission mode.

About India's the status of Stolen idols and artefacts

SMUGGLING A SAINT

Some major antiquities that have been stolen from India in the past decade

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Saint Manikkavachakar Bronze, 11th century AD Origin Sripuranthan, Tamil Nadu Stolen Jan 18, 2006 Value \$1million</p> | <p>Tamil Nadu Stolen 2005-06, the authorities estimate Value \$2.5 million</p> |
| <p>Mahakoka Devata Sandstone, 2nd century BC Origin Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh Stolen After 2004, the authorities estimate Value \$15 million</p> | <p>Mithuna Sandstone, 11th century AD Origin Varaha temple, Madhya Pradesh Stolen After 2004, the authorities estimate Value \$125,000</p> |
| <p>Uma Parmeshvari Bronze, 11th century AD Origin Sripuranthan,</p> | <p>Vikuntha or Vishnu head Terra-cotta, circa AD 300 Origin Srinagar, J&K Stolen After 2005, the authorities estimate Value \$75,000</p> |

Saint Manikkavachakar

Source: New York Times

Source: Indiapedia

A 2013 report of CAG highlighted that 131 antiquities were stolen from monuments/sites and 37 antiquities from Site Museums from 1981 to 2012. Apart from that, about some 200-odd idols are being returned by the US, Britain, Canada and Australia to India.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the nodal agency to retrieve stolen or illegally exported art objects. From 1976 to 2001, 19 antiquities had been retrieved by the ASI from foreign countries.

This is done either through legal means, indemnity agreement, voluntary action or throughout case settlement. But after 2001, the ASI had not been able to achieve any success.

Read more: [Karnataka has most number of stolen artefacts](#)

About Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) functions under the Ministry of Culture. It is the premier organization for archaeological research and the protection of the cultural heritage of the nation. Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime objective of the ASI.

Functions of ASI

- Regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- Regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.

For the maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance, the entire country is divided into 24 circles.

Note: Article 51A(f) of the Constitution mentions that “It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.”

Read more: [Monuments in India: issues and Challenges](#)

What steps have been undertaken by the government to protect arts and artefacts from being stolen?

Legislations: Indian Treasure Trove Act (1949) and [Antiquities And Art Treasures Act 1972](#).

The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958: It provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance. It also provides for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.

National Mission On Monuments And Antiquities: The mission aims to prepare a National database on Built Heritage and sites from secondary sources and a National database on Antiquities from different sources and museums.

National Manuscript Mission: The mission was established in February 2003, by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India. It aims to unearth and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India. This will help India to connect its past with its future. It also helps to connect India's memory with its aspirations.

Read more: [Schemes administered by the Ministry of Culture to promote and disseminate the art & Culture](#)

International collaborations

India is a signatory to the 1970 **UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property**. India also ratified the convention in 1977.

Private initiatives

India Pride Project: It is a group of art enthusiasts who uses social media to identify stolen religious artefacts from Indian temples and secure their return.

Read more: [A catalogue of all that's valuable](#)

What are the challenges in controlling idols and artefacts stealing?

In India, Stealing of idols and artefacts is common because,

The size of the black market: Stealing arts and artefacts has lucrative illegal business prospects. According to the Global Financial Integrity (GFI) Report, the Illegal trade of artefacts and antiquities is one of the world's most Profitable Criminal Enterprises (\$6 Billion dollars). UNESCO also confirmed that ISIS is trafficking in art and antiquities to finance its operations, and earning approximately US\$ 1 million of revenue a day.

Lack of protection in temples: There is a lack of protection for Indian Temples. For instance, Southern Tamil Nadu has many ancient temples situated in small, abandoned premises of a village. With non-existent security, idols are routinely stolen by local thieves.

Lack of focus on Organised crime: Though the Indian government has taken active steps to bring back the stolen idols and artefacts, there is lack of adequate attention to curb the organized stealing of idols and artefacts. For instance, (a) even two years after the stealing of *Nataraja* and *Uma Maheshvari* (this idol was in Singapore) idols, there was lack of awareness among the authorities about the theft; (b) Though stolen idols and artefacts were found in many Western museums and auction-houses, Indian authorities do not have enough track of how the stolen artefacts reached the Western markets and about their internal connivance.

4) Inefficiency of the ASI: 2013 report titled "Preservation and Conservation of Monuments and Antiquities" released by CAG highlights the **Inefficiency of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)**. Such as; (a) Excavation and preservation require distinct skill-sets and expertise, but ASI seeks to combine them both; (b) ASI had never participated in or collected information on Indian antiquities put on sale at well-known international auction houses such as Sotheby's, Christie's, etc. This is because there was **no explicit provision in the AAT (Antiquities and Art Treasures) Act, 1972** for doing so.

5) Lack of Community Participation: Local community is usually the first respondent to path-breaking discoveries. For instance, the Rakhigarhi Excavation was first reported on farming land by local workers and farmers. But in India, there is an **absence of incentives** to identify and report idols and artefacts discovery, stealing and even the recovery.

Read more: [Ministry of Culture is reprinting "Mongolian Kanjur" manuscripts](#)

What should be done?

Active involvement from ASI: Worldwide, organisations took many more effective steps. Such as checking catalogues of the international auction house(s), posting information about the theft in the **International Art Loss Registry**, and sending photographs of stolen objects electronically to dealers and auction houses and intimate scholars in the field. Hence, the ASI should be equipped with adequate powers to protect Indian arts and artefacts.

India **should sign the 1995 UNIDROIT** (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects.

Follow the steps of Italy: Italy is a country with the highest UNESCO Natural and Cultural Heritage sites. Many best practices to retrieve stolen artefacts originate in Italy. Such as,

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(1) A specific law on protecting cultural heritage, with enhanced penalties; (2) Centralised management before granting authorisation for archaeological research; (3) Specialisation in cultural heritage for public prosecutors; (4) An inter-ministerial committee for recovery and return of cultural objects; (5) MOUs and bilateral agreements (6) Created a complete inventory of moveable and immovable cultural heritage, with detailed catalogues; (7) Monitoring and inspection of cultural sites; and (8) Centralised granting of export requests.

India can also follow the steps of Italy and implement reforms in this area.

Frame a Portable Antiquities Scheme like the UK: The UK encourages local communities to voluntarily report and register the discovery of artefacts with help of experts. India has to implement similar schemes in mission mode to prevent idols and artefacts from stealing.

Read more: [Interpol's "ID-Art App" to help protect cultural property](#)

Unless there is a multi-pronged action from the government to target loopholes in domestic legislation and enforcement, the stealing of idols and artefacts will continue to erode India's invaluable cultural heritage.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Ropeways in India: Advantages, Challenges and Suggestions – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Recently, over 40 people were trapped mid-air in cable cars in Jharkhand's Deoghar. The Indian Air Force had to mount a rescue mission. The mission took 45 hours to rescue all passengers but unfortunately, three lives were lost. Though the incident has been termed as a 'unique accident' or 'statistical rarity', the event highlights the challenges associated with the ropeways. A government-backed agency had conducted a safety audit about three weeks before the incident mentioned that the ropeway system has '24 local flaws/initiation of flaws' and recommended a 'close visual watch' on the rope and its joints or the 'splicing portions'.

About the present ropeway accident

The ropeway is situated around 20 km from the famous Baba Baidyanath Shiv temple in Deoghar. It is India's highest vertical ropeway and is around 766-metres-long. Further, the ropeway is located in densely forested valleys surrounded by hills.

A pulley of one of the cable cars got stuck resulting in the incident. The trolleys were hanging mid-air at a height of nearly 100 feet. The Trikuta hills are 392 meters high, making rescue operations difficult except by helicopters. There is a service rope to rescue people if trolleys get stuck. However, in this incident; the service rope could not be used. This is because the operational rope sagged owing to the weight of the stranded cable cars, thus increasing the gap between the service and operational rope.

The rescue operation was conducted by the Indian Air Force with assistance from the Indian Army, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the district administration.

What are ropeways and how are they regulated?

It is a transport system for materials or people, used especially in mines or mountainous areas. In ropeways, carriers are suspended from moving cables powered by a motor.

The regulatory authority of ropeways in India

In February 2021, the Government amended the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961. This amendment enabled the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)** to look after the development of Ropeways and Alternate Mobility Solutions.

The Ministry also has the responsibility for the development of ropeway and alternative mobility solutions technology, as well as construction, research, and policy in this area. Formulation of the institutional, financial, and regulatory frameworks for the technology also falls under the ambit of this allocation.

What initiatives have been taken by the Government to promote Ropeways?

Before 2018, there were 65 ropeways in India, with several others were under construction or were being considered, mainly in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Northeastern States.

In 2018, Niti Aayog released a draft public-private partnership agreement framework to guide State governments in the design and implementation of ropeway projects.

National Ropeways Development Programme: In [Union Budget 2022-23](#), the government has announced that the National Ropeways Development Programme – “**Parvatmala**” will be initiated through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) is the Nodal Ministry of the programme. The programme aims to develop Ropeways in hilly areas of the country in a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

The programme will also cover congested urban areas, where conventional mass transit systems are not feasible. The programme is being presently started in regions like Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Jammu & Kashmir and the other North-Eastern states.

Read more: [Ministry of Tourism has formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India](#)

What are the advantages of creating ropeway infrastructure in India?

Ideal for difficult/challenging/sensitive terrain: Developing an efficient transport network is a big challenge in hilly areas. The rail and air transport networks are limited in these areas, while the development of road networks has technical challenges. Against this backdrop, Ropeways emerge as a safe alternate transport mode.

Economic benefits: (a) Ropeways having multiple cars propelled by a single power plant and drive mechanism. This reduces both construction and maintenance costs; (b) Further, the ropeways employ a single operator for an entire ropeway. This results in huge savings in labour costs. (c) On level ground, the cost of ropeways is competitive with narrow-gauge railroads. On the other hand, in the mountains the ropeway is far superior to railroads.

Economical mode of transportation: Ropeway projects are built in a straight line over hilly terrain. Hence, despite having a higher cost of construction per km than roadways, ropeway projects' construction cost may happen to be economical than roadways.

Boon for local people: This mode of transportation enables mobility for people living in difficult areas and helps them become part of the mainstream. Villagers/farmers living in such areas are able to sell their produces in other areas, which in turn will help them grow their income.

Environmentally friendly: Only narrow vertical supports are needed at intervals for ropeways, leaving the rest of the ground free. This makes it possible for ropeways to be constructed in built-up areas and in places where there is intense competition for land use.

They also have low dust emissions. Further, material containers can be designed so as to rule out any soiling of the environment.

Other advantages

Ability to handle large slopes: Ropeways and cableways (cable cranes) can handle large slopes and large differences in elevation.

Faster mode of transportation: Owing to the aerial mode of transportation, ropeways have an advantage over roadway projects.

Last-mile connectivity: Ropeway projects adopting 3S (a kind of cable car system) or equivalent technologies can transport 6000-8000 passengers per hour.

Transport of different materials: A ropeway allows the simultaneous transportation of different types of material.

Read more: [PM Gati Shakti – National Infrastructure Master Plan – Explained, pointwise](#)

What are the challenges associated with ropeways?

In February 2010, the Ministry of Environment & Forests released an EIA guidance manual for ropeways. The manual lists a wide range of impacts due to ropeways, such as,

Disturb fragile mountain ecosystems: Ropeway projects are rarely planned in isolation. They are usually the precursors of development. For instance, in the construction of the Jakhu ropeway in Himachal Pradesh, over 100 Deodar trees, some of which were over 200 years old, were cut down.

Change in topography and drainage pattern: Topsoil erosion and Soil contamination due to project activities might create a loss of productive soil and impact natural drainage patterns in the region.

Other challenges include **(a)** Loss of forest cover; **(b)** Habitat fragmentation; **(c)** Blocking of migratory corridors, **(d)** Exploitation of ground/surface water.

Researchers found that ropeways built in Nepal in 1998 destroyed the existing drainage corridor and caused heavy flooding and erosion in the monsoon of 1999.

Threats due to increased tourism: The use of ropeways is directly connected with tourism and commercial purposes. They will open up hilltops for tourism, which were earlier accessible to people only on foot.

This increased thrust will result in: **(a)** Increasing emissions from vehicles and generators; **(b)** Creating impacts of vibration and waste generation; **(c)** Damaging the historically important sites in the area.

Hence, opening up areas to tourism without any cumulative assessment of impacts on hill ecology, wildlife and local livelihoods, risk evaluation, and carrying capacity studies could be dangerous.

Read more: [Urban Mobility in India- Challenges and Way Forward](#)

What should be done?

Proper study before construction: In fragile ecosystems such as the Himalayas, ropeways should be constructed only if geological studies and environmental impact assessment reports don't highlight any serious concerns.

Cause no disturbance to the ecology: While constructing ropeways the government should take utmost efforts to **bypass the reserved forest and other ecologically sensitive areas**. Similarly, the government should also take mitigating measures to compensate for the loss of forest cover by replantation. Restoration/Regeneration of rare plants of economic importance, especially medicinal plant species.

Reduce solid waste generation: The government should explore the options for the minimization of solid waste. Simultaneously, environmentally compactable recycling of waste to conserve natural resources should be planned.

Periodic Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) activities: The government should ensure proper MRO activities in the already constructed ropeways. These activities must address issues in fire safety, ensure the safety and proper functioning of SOS operations, and address mechanical and electrical issues. This will prevent any further incidences like Deoghar.

Read more: [\[Yojana April Summary\] Fintech Revolution – Explained, pointwise](#)

The Indian government has been advocating ropeways for tourism and urban transport. They are encouraged as a low-cost, low-energy form of transport and development that can reduce pollution. But as pointed out by experts and communities, the government should address the unintended consequences associated with ropeways.

Source: [Mint](#), [PIB](#)