



7 PM COMPILATION

16th to 31st March, 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
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Karnataka High Court Judgment on Hijab – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Indian Constitution and Polity

Sub topic:- significant provisions and basic structure

The Issue of Sealed Cover Jurisprudence – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Indian Constitution and Polity

Sub topic:- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

[Kurukshetra March Summary] Agriculture Development – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Economic development

Sub topic:- Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

India-Australia Bilateral Relationship – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- International Relations

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

Central University Entrance Test: Benefits and Concerns – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Social Justice

Sub topic:- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Combating TB: Lessons from COVID-19 – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Social Justice

Sub topic:- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Comparison of National Pension Scheme with Old Pension System – 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

Heat Waves: Rising Frequency and Intensity – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Disaster Management

Sub topic:- Disaster and disaster management.

India's Exports Reach US\$ 400 billion: Reasons, Challenges and Way Ahead – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Economic development

Sub topic:- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

5th BIMSTEC Summit – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- International Relations

Sub topic:- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

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Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill: Features, Benefits and Concerns – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Governance

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The Assam-Meghalaya Boundary Dispute Resolution – Explained, pointwise

Topic:- Indian Constitution and Polity

Sub topic:- Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Karnataka High Court Judgment on Hijab – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

A three-judge Bench of the High Court of Karnataka has pronounced its verdict on the petitions related to the row over wearing of hijab by female students in educational institutions. The bench ruled that wearing of hijab (head scarf) by Muslim women does not form a part of essential religious practices in the Islamic faith. The verdict has received a mixed response with some legal scholars pointing out the issues with the 'essential practices' test. Appeal has already been filed in the Supreme Court.

What is the background of the issue?

The Karnataka government had passed an order **prescribing the wearing of uniforms in schools and pre-university colleges** under provisions of the Karnataka Education Act, 1983. The row had erupted after some Muslim girl students of the Government PU College for Girls, Udupi, said that they were denied entry to the college for wearing hijab. However, the college authorities claimed that they had prescribed a uniform and no religious attire was permissible to be worn along with the uniform.

The aggrieved Muslim girl students studying in two government pre-university colleges in Udupi district approached Karnataka High Court (HC) against the prescription of dress code and denial of right to wear hijab. The **petitioners argued** that wearing of **hijab is a part of essential religious practice as per Islamic faith** and college authorities cannot prevent them from attending classes wearing hijab.

The bench, in its **interim order passed on February 10**, had restrained all students regardless of their faith from wearing saffron shawls, scarfs, hijab, religious flags or the like in classrooms until further orders.

What is the Karnataka High Court Judgment on Hijab issue?

The High Court ruled that **wearing of hijab (head scarf)** by Muslim women **does not form a part of essential religious practices** in Islamic faith and it is **not protected under the right to freedom of religion** guaranteed under **Article 25** of the Constitution of India.

The Court ruled that the **prescription of school uniforms does not violate either the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1) (a)** or the **right to privacy under Article 21** of the Constitution.

The Court held that the restriction against wearing of hijab in educational institutions is only a **reasonable restriction**. This is **constitutionally permissible** and the students cannot object to it. Thus it upheld the legality of the Karnataka Government's February 5 order.

The Court held that in '**qualified public places**' like schools; there cannot be the assertion of individual rights to the general detriment of general discipline and decorum.

Rules made at such places can't be seen as diluting rights under Article 14 (equality before law), Article 15 (no discrimination) and Article 19 (1) (freedom of expression).

How is religious freedom protected under the Constitution?

Article 25(1) of the Constitution guarantees the **freedom of conscience** and the **right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion**. It is a right that guarantees negative liberty — which means that the State shall ensure that there is no interference or obstacle to exercising this freedom.

However, like all fundamental rights, the right to religious freedom is not absolute in nature. The State can restrict it on grounds of **public order, morality, health and other fundamental rights**.

What is the Supreme Court's view on Religious Freedom?

The Supreme Court has evolved a practical test to determine what religious practices can be constitutionally protected and what can be ignored.

In the **Shirur Mutt Case (1954)**, the '**doctrine of essentiality**' was invented by the Supreme Court. The Court held that the term 'religion' will cover all rituals and practices '**integral**' to a religion, and took upon itself the responsibility of determining the essential and non-essential practices of a religion. The essential religious practice doctrine **protects only such religious practices which were essential and integral to the religion**.

Where has the Supreme Court applied the essential religious practices test?

In 2004, the Supreme Court held that the **Ananda Marga sect had no fundamental right to perform the Tandava dance in public streets** since it did not constitute an essential religious practice of the sect.

In 2016, the Supreme Court upheld the discharge of a Muslim airman from the Indian Air Force for keeping a beard. The Court essentially held that **keeping a beard was not an essential part of Islamic practices**.

In **Seshammal v State of Tamil Nadu (1972)** the Supreme Court upheld the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Act, 1970. The Court ruled that the purpose of the Act was to regulate secular functions like management and administration. It did not aim to regulate or change the rituals and ceremonies followed in the temples.

In **Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb v State of Bombay (1962)**, the 5 Judge Bench of the Supreme Court upheld the right and power of excommunication bestowed upon the Head Priest of the Dawoodi Bohra Community. It was further observed that **what constitutes an essential practice is to be gathered from the texts and tenets of the religion**. The Court said the Legislature was not permitted to reform a religion out of existence or identity.

What are some criticisms of the essential religious practices test?

Scholars of Constitutional law like Prof. Faizan Mustafa (Vice-Chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad) have argued that the essentiality/integrality doctrine has tended to **lead the Court into an area that is beyond its competence**, and **given judges the power to decide purely religious questions**. As a result, over the years, Courts have been **inconsistent** on this question e.g., in **Gandhi v. State of Bombay (1954)**, the Supreme Court had said that no outside authority has any right to say that these are the essential parts of religion and it is not open to the secular authority of the state to restrict or prohibit them in any manner they like.

Prof. Mustafa points out that in some cases the Courts have **relied on religious texts** to determine essentiality, while in others the judgments were based on the **empirical behaviour of followers**. In yet some other Judgments, the Court based their decision on whether the practice existed at the time the religion originated, overlooking the fact that religious practices evolve over time.

What are the earlier Judgments on Hijab?

Amna Bint Basheer v Central Board of Secondary Education (2016): The Kerala HC held that the practice of wearing a hijab constitutes an essential religious practise but did not quash the dress code prescribed by CBSE. It rather provided additional safeguards, such as examining students wearing full sleeves when needed.

Fathima Tasneem v State of Kerala (2018): The Kerala HC held that **collective rights of an institution would be given primacy over the individual rights** of the petitioner. The case involved two girls who wanted to wear the headscarf. The school refused to allow the headscarf. However, the Court dismissed the appeal as students were no longer in the rolls of the respondent-School.

What are the concerns associated with Karnataka High Court Judgment on Hijab?

Narrow View: The Judgment observes ‘...the Holy Quran does not mandate wearing of hijab or headgear for Muslim women...because of absence of prescription of penalty or penance for not wearing hijab....It is not that if the alleged practice of wearing hijab is not adhered to, those not wearing hijab become sinners, Islam loses its glory and it ceases to be a religion’. Prof. Mustafa argues this interpretation would seriously curtail the scope of religious freedom of all religions because this can be said about most religious practices. According to him the **judgment has taken an extremely narrow view of the freedom of conscience** and has demanded too heavy a burden of proof.

Impact on Personal Freedom: Prof. Mihira Sood of National Law University, Delhi has opined that **women should have the right to choose the attire they want to wear**. She argues that Courts are not the platform for religious reforms; ‘Individual fundamental liberties provide a far more sound and stable foundation for reform than secular Courts ruling on religious doctrine, which they are ill-equipped to do’.

What lies ahead?

Petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court against the High Court Judgment. The Supreme Court has already referred the review of the *Sabarimala* Judgment (2018) to a larger bench and is considering the **correctness of the doctrine of essentiality** and **whether Courts should assume the role of clergy**. The Supreme Court Judgment on the issue will settle the debate.

On the administrative front, the Government needs to enhance **cooperation with parents, various organizations and communities** to prioritize the education of students above everything else.

Ms. Farida Khanam, an eminent Islamic scholar and Chairperson of the Centre for Peace and Spirituality, quotes several instances from the life of Prophet of Islam and argues that hijab had never been prescribed in the Holy Quran. She exhorts that Muslims must accept the Karnataka HC judgment wholeheartedly and take part in all educational facilities.

Conclusion

Constitution guarantees freedom of religion as a fundamental right but it is not a sacrosanct right and can be curtailed on some grounds. The recent judgment is a testimony to this and should be followed in letter and spirit until the final Judgment by the Supreme Court

The Issue of Sealed Cover Jurisprudence – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

On March 15 2022, two separate benches of the Supreme Court red-flagged the practice of Courts accepting information from the Government agencies in sealed envelopes. In a case involving the Bihar Government, a three-judge bench headed by the Chief Justice N V Ramana made it clear that it wanted all arguments to be presented in open court. Justice D Y Chandrachud expressed similar concern while hearing on an appeal against Union Government’s ban on the Malayalam TV Channel, MediaOne. The channel had gone off air on February 8 after the Kerala High Court

upheld the ban by relying on documents submitted by the Union Government in a sealed envelope. But when the government repeated this practice before the Supreme Court, it was pulled up by a three-judge bench led by Justice Chandrachud that stayed the ban. Both the situations have again ignited debates over the usage and relevance of 'Sealed Cover Jurisprudence'.

What is sealed cover jurisprudence?

It is a practice used by the Supreme Court and sometimes the lower courts, of asking for or accepting information from government agencies in **sealed envelopes that can only be accessed by the judges.**

No specific law defines the requirement of information in a sealed cover. The Supreme Court derives its power to use it from **Rule 7 of order XIII of the Supreme Court Rules** and **Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.**

It is stated under the said rule that if the Chief Justice or Court directs certain information to be kept in a sealed cover, **no party would be allowed access to the contents of such information,** except without the permission of the Chief Justice or the Court.

What is the rationale behind its application?

Public Interest: Rule 7 states that Courts can accept sealed covers and keep the information confidential if its publication is not considered to be in the interest of the public e.g., not disclosing **details about survivors of sexual assaults or child abuse.**

National Security: According to the Evidence Act, official unpublished documents relating to affairs of the State are protected and a public officer cannot be compelled to disclose such documents. This is required to maintain the national security of the country.

Facilitate Investigation: Information may be sought in secrecy when its publication impedes an ongoing investigation, such as details which are part of a police case diary or money laundering cases.

International Commitments: Information needs to be kept confidential if it falls under the secret clauses of international commitments that can't be put in public domain by the participating nations.

What are some of the well-known cases involving Sealed Cover Jurisprudence?

Rafale fighter jet deal Case (2018): The Court had asked the Centre to submit details related to the deal's decision making and pricing in a sealed cover. This was done as the Centre had contended that such details were subject to the Official Secrets Act and Secrecy clauses in the deal.

National Register of Citizens (NRC) Case: The NRC coordinator was asked by the Supreme Court to submit period reports in sealed cover, which could neither be accessed by the Government nor the petitioners.

BCCI Reforms Case (2014): The probe committee of the cricket body had submitted its report to the Supreme Court in a sealed envelope. It requested the Court not to make public the names of nine cricketers who were suspected of a match and spot fixing scam.

Bhima Koregaon case (2018): In this case activists were arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). The Supreme Court had relied on information submitted by the Maharashtra police in a sealed cover.

Information submitted by state agencies in a sealed cover was also relied upon in the 2G and coal scam cases, the *Ram Janmabhoomi* case, the high-profile case pertaining to the death of judge B.H. Loya etc.

What are the concerns associated with the sealed cover jurisprudence?

Impact on Fair Trial: Fair Trial involves an opportunity to see and cross examine the evidence produced by one party against the other party. However, sealed covers impairs this opportunity and undermines natural justice.

Undermines transparency and Accountability: Critics of this practice contend that it is not favourable to the principles of transparency and accountability. It stands against the idea of an open court, where decisions can be subjected to public scrutiny.

Breeds Arbitrariness: It is also said to enlarge the scope for arbitrariness in Judicial decisions. Judges are supposed to lay down reasoning for their decisions, but this cannot be done when they are based upon information submitted confidentially and can't be quoted in the Judgment.

Credibility of Judiciary: An increased reliance on seal cover can impair the credibility of judges as well as the legal system. It can also create suspicion among masses towards formulation of bureaucratic-judicial nexus against them.

Restricts freedom of speech and expression: A citizen can duly exercise her right under Article 19 when requisite information is available to her. Sealed cover impedes flow of information thereby restricting freedom of speech and expression. Further freedom of press is also curtailed as seen in case of recent ban on Media one channel.

What are some of the cases where sealed cover jurisdiction was criticized by courts?

P. Gopalakrishnan vs The State of Kerala (2019): The Supreme Court said that disclosure of documents to the accused is constitutionally mandated, even if the investigation is ongoing. The documents may lead to a breakthrough in the investigation.

INX Media case (2019): A Bench of the Supreme Court had criticized the Delhi High Court for basing its decision to deny bail to the former Union Minister on documents submitted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a sealed cover.

What lies ahead?

First, the **government should resort to alternate methods** for protecting sensitive information and maintaining confidentiality. For instance, in-camera hearings already provide sufficient protection to sensitive information. In the *Anuradha Bhasin* case (2020), that dealt with security measures in Jammu and Kashmir following the abrogation of Article 370; the Supreme Court had ruled that **any portion perceived sensitive could be redacted**, and the rest should be disclosed to the opposite party.

Second, the **Supreme Court itself should reduce the demand for information in a sealed cover** as the Court on many occasions has demanded sealed covers e.g., in the case involving corruption allegations against a former CBI director, the Court insisted that the Central Vigilance Commission submit its report in a sealed cover. The rationale was ostensibly to maintain public confidence in the agency.

Third, the **three-judge bench in the MediaOne case** has said that it will expand the ambit of the case to **deal with sealed cover jurisprudence**. It is expected that the Court may formulate some concrete guidelines for acceptance of information in a sealed cover.

Fourth, the **government should function by upholding the doctrine of public trust** which states that people are the real masters and government is a mere trustee holding things on their behalf. Therefore only a minuscule number of things must remain in the realm of secrecy like delicate international negotiations or those that relate to sensitive aspects of security etc.

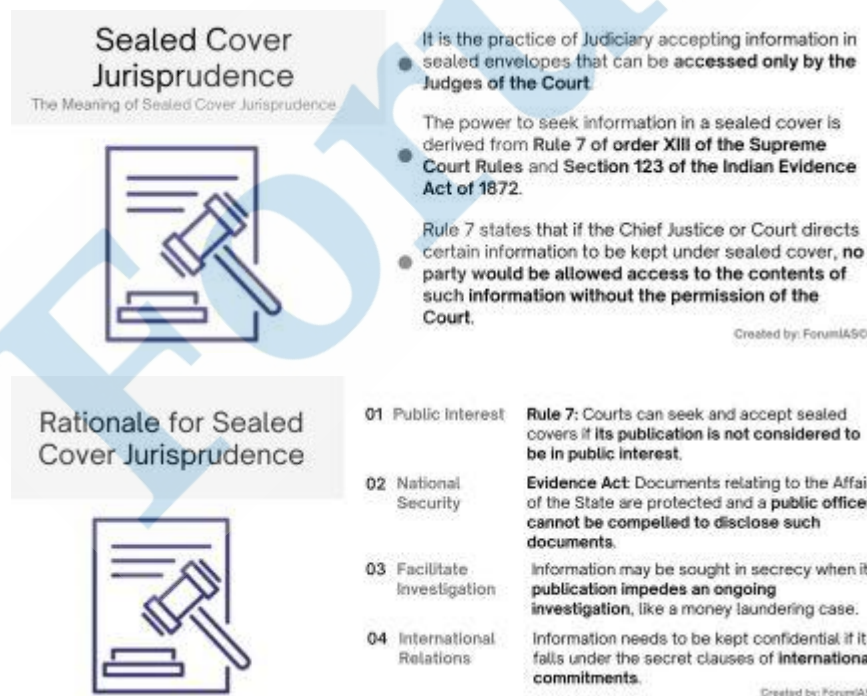
Fifth, the courts also need to make sure that when an action is alleged to have curtailed fundamental rights, they are **bound to examine the legality of the action through the lens of proportionality** as said in **K.S Puttaswamy Case (2017)**.



Conclusion

The Supreme Court's red flagging of sealed cover jurisprudence is a welcome step. It must now decisively curtail this practice in order to enhance the trust of masses in the legal system and ensure due adherence to the principle of natural justice.

Summary in Graphics



Cases involving Sealed Cover Jurisprudence



- Rafale Fighter Jet Deal Case (2018)
- National Register of Citizens Case
- BCCI Reforms Case (2014)
- Bhima Koregaon Case (2018)
- Ram Janmbhoomi Case
- The Supreme Court criticized the practice in the *P. Gopalakrishnan vs The State of Kerala* (2019) and the *INX Media* case (2019)

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Way Forward on Sealed Cover Jurisprudence



- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 01 Alternative Measures | Alternative measures can be used to protect information e.g., redacting only limited sensitive information. |
| 02 Check by the Supreme Court | The Supreme Court should lead by example and limit the occasions/cases in which information is sought in sealed covers. |
| 03 Guidelines | The Supreme Court has decided to examine the issue in the context of MediaOne case. Proper Guidelines can address the concerns. |
| 04 Corrective Action | Government should narrow the domain in which to limit the sharing of information. Judiciary must check every restriction through the lens of Proportionality Test. |

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Source: [Indian Express](#), [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu](#), [The Hindu](#)

[Kurukshetra March Summary] Agriculture Development – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Economic Survey 2021-22 has noted the resilience in the agriculture sector during the past two years. COVID-19 pandemic impacted the agriculture sector the least in comparison to the services and industry sectors of the economy. In India, agriculture and allied sectors account for **18.8% of Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy**. Against a pre-pandemic GVA **growth rate of 4.3%** (at 2011-12 constant prices) in 2019-20, it is expected to achieve the **growth rate of 3.9% in 2021-22**. However despite such resilience there are numerous issues that curtail the growth of the agricultural sector and hinder its long term sustainability. Realizing this, the recent union budget has proposed various initiatives and enhanced allocation towards the sector however much more needs to be done.

What are the issues associated with agriculture in India?

Access to Finance: The small and marginalized farmers are unable to get requisite finance from formal sources. They rely on traditional sources like village money lenders who charge a very high interest rate and induce them into debt trap.

Distress Sale: Agricultural marketing still continues to be in a bad shape in rural India. In the absence of sound marketing facilities, the farmers have to depend upon local traders and middlemen for the disposal of their farm produce which is sold at throw-away price.

Cropping Pattern: Wheat and rice are the two most dominant crops produced in India after the green revolution. They are water intensive and have lower nutritional properties in comparison to millets. Nonetheless, the availability of subsidized water pumps and guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) have enabled them to grow in rain deficit regions of Punjab and Haryana as well that has drastically impacted the ground water level.

According to the **Central Ground Water Board (CGWB)**, groundwater levels in Punjab decreased by about **85%** between 1984 and 2016.

Degree of mechanization: In spite of the large-scale mechanization of agriculture in some parts of the country, most of the agricultural operations in larger parts are carried on by human hand. They use simple and conventional tools and implements like wooden plough, sickle, etc. which leads to lesser productivity.

Dependence on monsoon: The Indian monsoon is becoming more erratic in nature. The country is witnessing a rise in more extreme shorter spells as well as an increase in dry seasons due to climate change. This has made the occupation even more challenging considering more than **60% of Indian agriculture is rain-fed.**

What are the announcements related to Agriculture in the Budget 2022-23?

Overall Allocation: The Budget allocated INR 132,513.62 crore to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoAFW). While the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DAFW) got an allocation of INR 124,000 crore, the Department of Agriculture Research and Education (DARE) was allocated INR 8,513.6 crore. There is a 12.59% increase in the allocation of MoAFW in comparison to the actual expenditure year in the year 2020-21.

Scheme allocation: The Budget 22-23 allocated INR 123,326 crore towards the schemes. The share of central sector schemes and centrally sponsored schemes in DAFW's total schematic budget allocation is 85.72% and 14.28%, respectively. **(a) Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)** – 15,000 crores; **(b) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)** – 68,000 crores; **(c) Promotion of Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) schemes** – 500 crore each; **(d) Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)** – 10433 crores; **(e) Krishonnati Yojana** – 7143 crores.

Table 2: Budget Allocation to Major Select Schemes of DAFW in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare

S. No.	Scheme	22-23 Budget Estimates (In Rs. Crore)	Percent share to Total Scheme Budget Allocation (in %)
1	2	3	4
Central Sector Schemes			
1	Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)	15,500	12.56
2	Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan)	68,000	55.13
3	Formation and Promotion of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)	500	0.40
4	Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)	500	0.40
5	National Beekeeping Honey Mission (NBHM)	100	0.08
6	Modified Interest Subvention Scheme (MISS)	19,500	15.81
6	Others	1,610	1.30
Total Central Sector Schemes		1,05,710	85.72
Centrally Sponsored Schemes			
7	Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)	10,433	8.45
8	Krishonnati Yojana	7,183	5.85
Total Centrally Sponsored Schemes		17,616	14.28
Total Central Sector & Centrally Sponsored Schemes		1,23,326	100.0

Source: Union Budget 2022, Ministry of Finance, Government of India

Source: Kurukshetra March 2022

Merging of Schemes: The RKVY scheme has been restructured and various schemes have been merged under it. This includes *Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana* (PMKSY), *Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana* (PKVY), National Project on Soil Health, Rainfed Area Development and Climate Change and others. *Krishonnati Yojana* has a number of schematic projects viz. Integrated Development of Horticulture, National Mission on Edible Oils – Oil palm, National Food Security Mission, Sub-Mission on agriculture Extension, etc.

Millets: The budget has promised to provide support for post-harvest value addition, enhancing domestic consumption and facilitating brand and market development of the millet based products nationally and internationally.

Technology: The government proposes to promote extensive use of 'Kisan Drones' for crop assessment, digitisation of land records, spraying of insecticides, pesticides and nutrients etc. Further a push for improving the *Kisan Sarathi* digital platform was also emphasized.

Promotion of Agri-tech startups: The Budget announced a NABARD funded scheme to promote agri-tech startups focusing on diverse aspects of agriculture. NABARD will set up a blended capital fund under the co-investment model to financially support the agriculture startups and rural enterprises.

Promotion of Natural Farming: The Budget vowed to promote chemical free natural farming throughout the country. To begin with, farmers' land in 5 km wide corridors along the river Ganga would be selected for promotion of natural farming practices.

Agriculture Cooperatives: The budget allocated Rs. 350 crore to digitize 63,000 primary agricultural credit societies (PACs) out of a total of 95,509 PACs in the country.

What is the significance of Budget announcements?

Propel the Growth rate: The enhanced allocation towards the sector will ensure a quick **agriculture-led economic growth**. Further integration of schemes would aim at ensuring higher growth in the agriculture sector, higher returns to the farmers and converged farming activities. This will provide the much needed relief to the sector and also reduce involuntary migration towards the cities.

Better Risk management: Allocation of PMFBY would help in mitigating risks in agriculture activities. PMFBY targets to cover 65 lakh farmers in FY22-23, with a coverage of 4.2 crore hectare of crop area.

Credit availability and Infrastructure creation: Focusing on Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) schemes would ensure increased credit availability and creation of better agri-infrastructure in rural areas.

Further, digitization of cooperatives will ensure smooth, adequate, hassle-free and cost-effective credit flow to the farmers. As it will ensure seamless financial transactions with utmost transparency and accountability.

Prudent Targeting: Amalgamation of various schemes under one umbrella scheme — *Krishonnati Yojana* would ensure effective targeting of eligible beneficiaries and enhance efficiency in the system.

Nutritional Security and Water efficiency: Focusing on nutri-cereals like millets can help in meeting the nutrition requirements of the citizens. Further they consume less water and are more tolerant to climate change.

Agritech Revolution: The *Kisan Sarathi* digital platform will improve the farmers' capability to negotiate and discover appropriate and just price, and consolidate their products for both the regulated and unregulated markets. Moreover, drones monitoring and assessment will help in improving farm practices for a higher and quality yield.

Culture of Agripreneurs: The NABARD initiative would ensure higher penetration of technology and technical expertise in the sector. It will help in establishing innovative, sustainable and profitable agriculture supply chain networks built by budding agripreneurs.

What further steps can be taken?

First, the government should ensure that there is **timely processing and settlements of claims** for insured farmers.

Second, the Budget's **current push for natural farming would require creation of adequate marketing facilities** specifically for organic farm products. There is also an urgent need to meet all logistic requirements in provision of input services to adoption of organic agronomic practices in the country.

Third, the farmers should be sensitized and encouraged to use more water efficient technology as switching to less water intensive crops can't happen overnight e.g., the **direct-seeded rice (DSR) method** can help reduce water consumption by as much as 35% over the traditional process of transplanting rice seedlings from a nursery to waterlogged fields.

Fourth, In the long run, the government needs to make sure that crop diversification occurs and farmers residing in rain deficit regions are not growing water intensive crops. For instance, Haryana launched the '**Mera Pani Meri Virasat**' scheme, under which an incentive of Rs 7,000 is being given to farmers to switch from paddy.

Conclusion

The Budget has reaffirmed its goal to transform the farm business into a lucrative one by modernizing agriculture through better input supplies and services, improving technology penetration, enhancing marketability of farm products and attracting investments into agriculture.

Source: Kurukshetra March 2022

India-Australia Bilateral Relationship – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The India Australia relationship has undergone rapid evolution in recent years, developing along a positive track, into a strategic partnership. The two nations have much in common, underpinned by shared values of a pluralistic, Westminster-style democracies, Commonwealth traditions, expanding economic engagement and increasing high level interaction. Recently, the 2nd India-Australia Virtual Summit took place on March 21, 2022. During the summit, the leaders reviewed the multi-faceted relationship between the two countries and exchanged views on regional and global developments. The Summit follows the historic first Virtual Summit on June 4, 2020 when the relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

What is the history of India Australia relationship?

The historical ties between India and Australia started immediately following European settlement in Australia from 1788. All trade to and from the penal colony of New South Wales was controlled by the British East India Company through Kolkata.

India and Australia established diplomatic relations in the pre-Independence period, with the establishment of India Trade Office in Sydney in 1941. The end of the Cold War and simultaneously India's decision to launch major economic reforms in 1991 provided the first positive move towards development of closer ties between the two nations.

With the passage of time, the relationship gained momentum towards a strategic relationship, alongside the existing economic engagement. Since the elevation of relationship in 2020, the countries have advanced practical actions on cyber and critical technologies, maritime affairs, defense ties, economic and business links and Quadrilateral cooperation.

What are the key outcomes of the 2nd Virtual Summit?

Announcements: (a) Establishment of **Annual Summit** between India and Australia; (b) Establishment of General Rawat India-Australia **Young Defense Officers' Exchange Programme**; (c) Return of artefacts by the Government of Australia; (d) Similar Tax benefits for investments by Australia's sovereign and pension funds in India as in Australia; (e) Financial Aid for Pacific Island Countries under Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) and International Solar Alliance (ISA) initiatives

Signed Documents: (a) MoU on Co-Investment in Australian Critical Minerals Projects between Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), India and Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO), Australia; (b) Letter of Intent regarding Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement; (c) Letter of Arrangement between India and Australia for Educational Qualifications Recognition; (d) MoU for cooperation and collaboration on broadcasting between Prasar Bharati, India and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia.

A **Joint Statement** was issued on the occasion covering various aspects of the deepening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

What progress has been made in India Australia Relationship in recent years?

Economic Cooperation: Bilateral trade between the two countries stood at about US\$ 12.5 billion in FY 2020- 21 and has already surpassed US\$ 17.7 billion in the first 10 months of FY 2021-22. Key imports from Australia include coal, gold and LNG while key exports to the country from India include diesel, petrol and gems and jewellery.

Security Cooperation: India and Australia are both members of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) along with the US and Japan. Further Australia participated in the 2020 and 2021 edition of Malabar Naval exercise.

Cultural Cooperation: Like India, Australia's story stretches back tens of thousands of years. Australia's Indigenous peoples are custodians of the oldest continuing civilisation in the world. This is the reason the Australian government returned 29 culturally significant artefacts to India.

Science and Technology: The countries have established an Australia-India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF) – a pillar of collaboration on science, technology and research and successfully conducted the 2021 India Australia Circular Economy Hackathon. Australia is also supporting India's Gaganyaan Space Program.

People to People Ties: Australia is investing in India's talented young people through a new Future Skills Initiative between education and training providers and industry. This

complements the Australian government's significant new *Maitri* scholarships and fellowships which gives Indian students and researchers the chance to experience Australia's world class education system.

Energy Cooperation: A Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement between the two countries was signed in 2014. The agreement came into force in 2015 and provides the framework for substantial new trade in energy between Australia and India.

Read More: [India-Australia relation: Towards sustainable future](#)

Regional and Multilateral Cooperation: Both the countries are part of QUAD, G20, WTO, WHO's COVAX, ISA etc. regional and multilateral initiatives.

What is the significance of India Australia relationship?

Indo-Pacific Stability: Both nations aspire a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. The establishment of QUAD grouping and active participation by both is necessary to counter China's actions in the region.

Gateway to Pacific Countries: The growing cooperation would help India get better access to Pacific Island nations like Kiribati, Solomon Islands etc. as Australia enjoys a high degree of influence over them.

Indian Diaspora: As per the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2016 census, 619,164 people in Australia declared that they were of ethnic Indian ancestry which made 2.8% of the Australian population. This huge number induces India to work in tandem with Australia for ensuring their well being and development.

Upholding International Law: Both the nations have a firm commitment on a rule based international order. They believe in sovereign equality of nations and progression based on mutual respect and understanding.

Geo Strategic Considerations: Considering Australia's proximity with the Indian Ocean, active engagement is desired for maintaining India's strong position in the Indian Ocean region. Further, Australia's support is desired for getting membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and bringing reforms to UNSC.

What are the concerns impeding the relationship?

India's stand on Russia- Ukraine crisis: Australia has criticized Russian invasion of Ukraine and sided with the U.S. and western countries. However, India has refrained from criticizing Russia over the issue. This can create differences in bilateral discourse and the functioning of QUAD.

No Free Trade Agreement: Both the nations have been interacting and communicating with each other for decades but have failed to create a consensus on a Free trade agreement.

China's Discontent: China is unhappy with growing security cooperation between Australia and India. The Chinese government responded to the Quadrilateral dialogue by issuing formal diplomatic protests to its members, calling it "Asian NATO".

Lack of Uranium Supply: The progress on uranium supply has been very low, despite efforts from both sides. In 2017, Australia had sent its first uranium shipment to India but that was cited as "a small sample of uranium" transferred "purely for testing purposes".

What lies ahead?

First, the countries should focus on concluding an Early Harvest Agreement and later on signing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). An early harvest trade agreement is

used to liberalize tariffs on the trade of certain goods between two countries or trading blocs before a comprehensive FTA (Free Trade Agreement) is concluded.

Read More: [Explained: India-Australia interim trade agreement and FTA](#)

Second, the High Commissions of both the nations should ensure that the proposed agreements are duly signed in future.

Third, interaction should be enhanced in the emerging fields like cyber security and cyber governance. The inaugural India-Australia Foreign Ministers' Cyber Framework Dialogue held on 12 February 2022 is a positive step in this regard.

Fourth, both India and Australia can work to remove the obstacles in supplying Uranium from Australia to India. This would help India attain its Energy Security and reduce the reliance on fossil fuels.

Conclusion

The virtual meeting reinforced the warmth and close bonds between India and Australia. Leaders of both sides reiterated their commitment to driving the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to new heights and working as the rule of law in the international arena.

Source: [The Hindu](#), [Ministry of External Affairs](#)

Central University Entrance Test: Benefits and Concerns – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Education is the foundation stone for overall well-being of an individual. Realizing this, the government is undertaking numerous reforms in the spirit of the New Education Policy. On March 21, 2022, the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced the introduction of the Central University Entrance Test (CUET), which is now mandatory for undergraduate admission at any of the 45 central universities in the country. It would be a computer-based exam conducted by the National Testing Agency in 13 languages and substitute the current practice of admission based on a candidate's score in 12th class.

What is the background of CUET?

Several governments, over the years, have made attempts to replace multiple entrance tests with a single common test. In 2010, the government had launched the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) however it failed to gather steam since only 14 central universities had adopted it until last year.

CUET is a revamped version of CUCET and it is now compulsory for all 45 central universities to adopt it. This has come after the announcement of the new National Education Policy (NEP), which advocates the need for an entrance test for university admissions.

What are the features of CUET?

The **National Testing Agency (NTA)**, which conducts entrance tests such as JEE (Main) and UGC-NET, will also conduct CUET for all central universities in the first week of July. A student's Board marks will have no role in determining her admission to a college or a programme. Admission will be based only on her CUET score. The Universities can use Board marks as the minimum eligibility criteria for admission though.

For skill-based courses that have major practical components, such as music, painting, sculpture and theatre, universities will be allowed to conduct practical exams or interviews along

with CUET. For professional programmes such as engineering and MBBS, central universities will admit through the entrance exams JEE (Main) and NEET respectively.

What will be the process of CUET?

It will be a **3.5 hours computer-based test** that will be held in two shifts and can be taken in **13 languages** — Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Urdu, Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi, Odia and English.

CUET will essentially have **three parts**.

The **first part will test a candidate on a language of her choice**. This will consist of reading comprehension, questions on vocabulary, synonyms and antonyms, besides other things. There will be a choice of 13 languages.

The **second part is focused on testing a candidate's domain-specific knowledge**. This section offers a total of 27 domains, and a candidate can choose to have her knowledge tested in at least one and a maximum of six domains.

The **third part of the entrance test will be a general test** with questions on general knowledge, current affairs, general mental ability, numerical ability, quantitative reasoning, logical and analytical reasoning.

Apart from the compulsory language test, a candidate's participation in the domain-specific part of CUET and the general test will depend on whether a central university wants it for the programme she is applying for.

What is the scope of CUET?

At the moment, CUET has been made compulsory for central universities but the government is open to other institutions, including private universities, adopting this examination instead of conducting their own.

Further, conducting admissions to postgraduate programmes through CUET is not compulsory for central universities. Therefore, they are free to adopt CUET for PG admissions or stick to their own admission process for now.

Why is the need of CUET?

Diversity in Evaluation: The government did not favor using Board marks for admission because of the 'diversity' in evaluation methods adopted by different Boards. Some Boards like CBSE are more generous than others in marking and this gives some students an unfair advantage over others.

Unrealistic Cutoffs: The current pattern has led to generation of unrealistic cutoffs in many universities e.g., many colleges of Delhi University released their first cutoff at 100%.

Second Chance: It would give students another opportunity to show their potential even if they are unable to score well in board examinations.

Improper Pandemic scores: During the pandemic, many schools awarded marks in an arbitrary manner or inflated the marks of their students. In such a situation, the 12th marks don't show a true picture of a candidate's capability.

Easing of Burden: The students need to give just one entrance test rather than multiple entrances for all the central universities which would save a lot of time and release considerable burden on them.

What are the concerns associated with CUET?

Burden on the Marginalized Section: Some academics have expressed fear that CUET will result in additional expenditure towards coaching. This would put financial strain on the marginalized section.

Reduce relevance of Board Examinations: With CUET in place, students might pay less attention to 12th class syllabus and school learning. They would focus on CUET and may even start skipping their regular classes as is done by many students who are preparing for JEE in Kota, Rajasthan.

Curtailing the Autonomy: The new system will curtail the autonomy of institutions to respond to ground realities. Cut-offs are decided so as to have desired over-admission to ensure that seats do not go empty after closure of admission process.

Infrastructure Deficit: It is not clear whether CUET will be conducted on a single day or multiple days. If it is conducted on a single day, then many cities especially tier 3 would not be able to provide the requisite number of computer labs and equipment for conducting the test.

Lack of Vernacular content: CUET can be taken in 13 languages but experts have expressed concerns over the quality of content that would be provided in vernacular languages versus English.

What lies ahead?

First, there should be a **minimum weightage of 12th marks** so that students don't completely ignore their board examinations for CUET.

Second, the **teachers of government schools should give additional classes** to students for preparing for CUET. This would reduce the financial burden of marginalized sections.

Third, the government should give **extra funds for spending on education** so that more computer labs are built for conducting CUET. The **National Education Policy** has prescribed raising expenditure to 6% of GDP on the country's education.

Fourth, the government can make a **provision of common counseling sessions** for CUET students in the future to ease the admission process as is done in the JEE(Main) entrance test.

Fifth, the NTA should deploy **additional vernacular experts** so that students of local languages don't feel at a disadvantage in comparison to English medium students.

Conclusion

The CUET can be a game changer in the sphere of higher education and help in curtailing the divide created by evaluation methodology of different education boards in the country. However, a greater degree of equity can be infused only when the issues surrounding CUET are duly addressed in a timely manner.

Source: [Indian Express](#), [The New Indian Express](#)

Combating TB: Lessons from COVID-19 – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

March 24 is observed as the World Tuberculosis day. The day is designed to build public awareness about the global epidemic of tuberculosis and efforts to eliminate the disease. It is a preventable and curable disease, but it continues to impact the lives and development of millions of children and adolescents. As per World Health Organization (WHO), children and young adolescents aged under 15 years represent about 11% of all people with TB globally. Experts suggest that replicating the strategies used to manage COVID-19 could prove beneficial in combating TB and limiting its prevalence and magnitude.

What is Tuberculosis (TB)?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious airborne bacterial disease caused by **Mycobacterium tuberculosis**. It most commonly affects the lungs but can also damage other parts of the body.

Types of TB-related conditions: **(a) Latent TB:** The bacteria remain in the body in an inactive state. They cause no symptoms and are not contagious, but they can become active; **(b) Active TB:** The bacteria do cause symptoms and can be transmitted to others; **(c) Multi Drug resistant (MDR) TB:** It is caused by an organism that is **resistant to at least isoniazid and rifampin**, the two most potent first line TB drugs. These drugs are used to treat all persons with TB disease; **(d) Extensively drug-resistant TB:** It is **resistant to both first- and second-line drugs** due to drug misuse and mismanagement. It is a more serious condition than MDR TB. Its **symptoms** usually include a cough (sometimes blood-tinged), weight loss, night sweats and fever. Patients with active symptoms require a long course of **treatment involving multiple antibiotics**.

What is the current status of TB?

In the decade between 2010-20, 1.5-2 million individuals died every year because of tuberculosis. TB disproportionately affects **people in low-income nations, the poor and the vulnerable**. According to **WHO's Global TB report 2021**, with 25.9 lakh TB cases, **India is home to 25% of the global tuberculosis cases**.

India has reported more than 20% decline in case notifications. The country reported 18 lakh tuberculosis cases in 2020 as compared to 24 lakh in 2019. The fall not due to reduced cases of the disease but due to under-reporting. Fear of COVID lockdowns and economic stress discouraged people from visiting medical facilities to notify of the disease and to get treatment.

What are the causes behind high occurrence of TB in India?

Poverty: A majority of TB patients in India get affected due to undernourishment. Poverty impacts their accessibility to food and ability to get treated which makes them more susceptible to occurrence and continuance of TB.

Bad Habits: Over a hundred million Indians smoke tobacco — a strong risk factor for both developing TB, and dying from it. A strong addiction towards it induces the person to consume tobacco even during the TB treatment which makes it difficult to cure.

Underreporting: One of the major factors of TB prevalence in India is under-reporting of TB cases. This leaves the risk of spreading TB to other healthy individuals. Inaccurate estimates of the tuberculosis burden in India between 2000-2015, has led the World Health Organization (WHO) to seriously underestimate the TB epidemic.

Social Attitude: Patients often hesitate to seek treatment or deny their condition altogether for fear of social discrimination and stigmatisation. Moreover, even after being diagnosed, they fail to complete their treatment resulting in development of multi drug resistance.

Many other issues like human resource shortage, payment delays, procurement delays and drug stock-outs add to prevalence of TB.

What steps have been taken for combating TB?

National Strategic Plan for TB elimination (2017-25): It plans to provide incentives to private providers for following the standard protocols for diagnosis and treatment as well as for notifying the government of cases. Further, patients referred to the government will receive a cash transfer to compensate them for the direct and indirect costs of undergoing treatment and as an incentive to complete treatment.

Nikshay: It is an online tuberculosis reporting system for medical practitioners and clinical establishments that aims to increase the reporting of tuberculosis, especially from the private sector.

TB-free India Campaign: It was launched to take the activities under the National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination forward in a mission mode for ending the epidemic by 2025.

Currently, **two vaccines VPM (Vakzine Projekt Management) 1002** and **MIP (Mycobacterium Indicus Pranii)** have been developed and identified for TB, and are under Phase-3 clinical trial.

Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine is presently the sole vaccine available for the prevention of Tuberculosis (TB). However, its efficacy is very less in countries on or near the equator like India, Kenya and Malawi, where the burden of TB is higher.

Read More: [Eliminating Tuberculosis \(TB\)](#)

What are the similarities between TB and COVID-19?

Both are transmissible and airborne infections.

Both are more likely to spread in crowded settings, and harm people with immuno-compromising conditions.

Both have impacted a huge number of people across the globe and can be controlled with collective efforts.

How has the arrival of COVID-19 caused a surge in cases of TB?

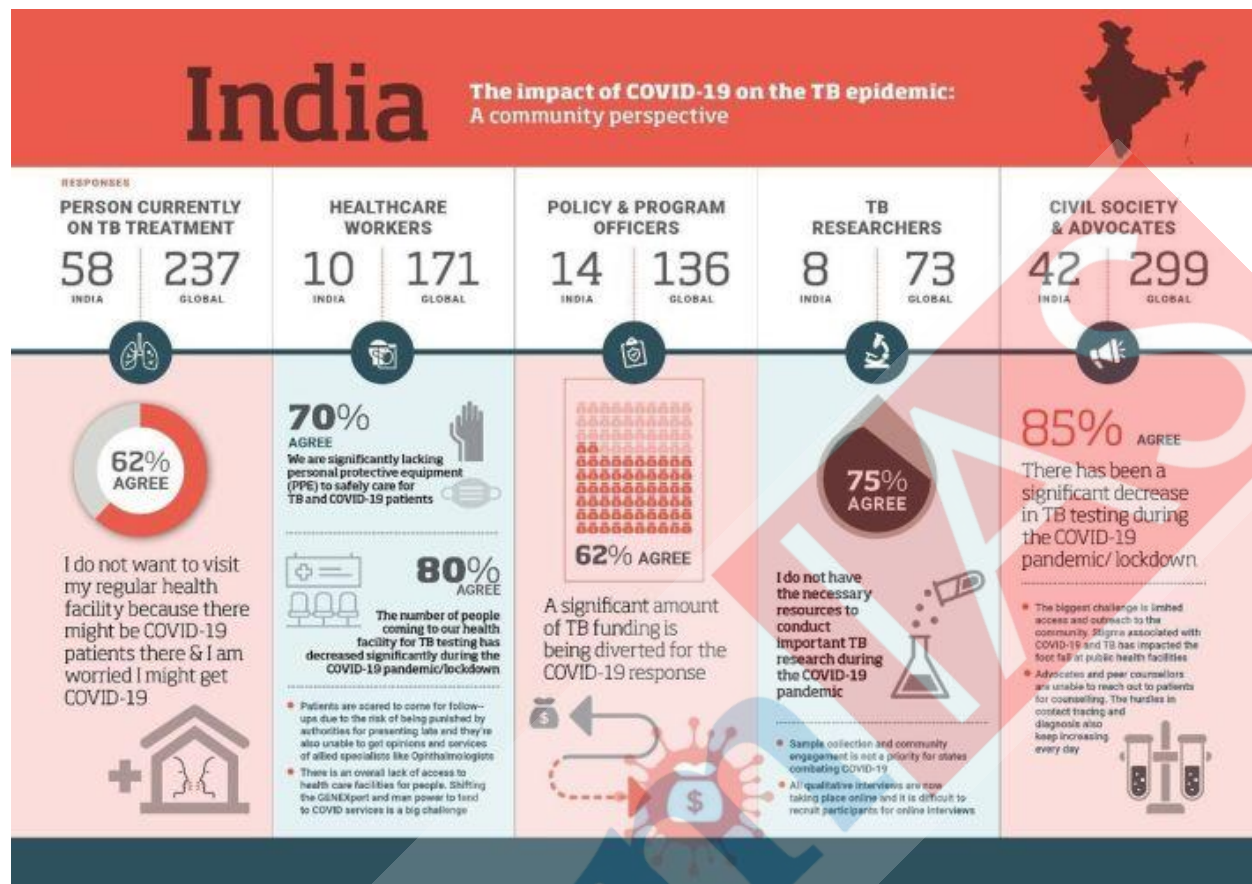
Lack of Testing: Before the Covid pandemic, it was assumed that a third of all individuals with TB were undiagnosed, and were likely spreading the disease in their communities. In the **past two years, case detection has dropped**, suggesting that the proportion of such 'missing cases' is likely to have increased.

Fear and Stigma: Lockdowns, the **fear of healthcare establishments and the stigma associated with respiratory symptoms** have possibly contributed to the increase in "missing cases".

Accessibility issue: For those diagnosed, access to medicines has not been easy during the Pandemic.

Shortage of Personnel: The redirection of human resources within the health system during the three Covid waves has left TB facilities understaffed leading to poorer quality and delayed care.

Historical Evidence: Studies have suggested that Covid may trigger pathways leading to reactivation of dormant TB bacilli. Historically, turmoil in society (such as wars), food insecurity, poverty and malnutrition have resulted in surges in the incidence of TB.



Source: BMJ Journal of Global Health

Read More: [COVID-19 reverses decades of progress in TB elimination, India worst-hit: WHO](#)

How can the lessons learnt from managing COVID-19 be used in combating TB?

Test, treat and track has been a strategy successfully employed for managing COVID-19. There is a need to aggressively scale up testing with innovative strategies such as active surveillance, bidirectional screening for respiratory tract infections using the most sensitive molecular diagnostics, and contact tracing.

The biggest victory against COVID-19 has been the **speed with which vaccines** were developed, scaled up and deployed. The same approach must be replicated for tuberculosis; lobbying for funding from governments and industry to develop a successful vaccine for TB.

During COVID-19, there was a **high degree of emphasis on sensitizing people** and inducing them to behave in COVID appropriate manner. This involved ventilation of indoor spaces, voluntary masking and avoidance of crowded places. We need to ensure similar behavior from TB patients to reduce the spread.

Read More: [Importance of COVID 19 learnings in fight against tuberculosis](#)

What more should be done towards combating TB?

First, India needs to **triple the funding** not just for TB but for health, nutrition and preventive services. It needs to actively invest on a similar scale as done during the COVID-19. For instance, the amount of money spent by governments for research and development in the first 11 months of the COVID-19 pandemic was 162 times the corresponding amount spent on TB in 2020.

Second, the country needs to **invest in state-of-the-art technologies**, build capacity, expand its health workforce and strengthen its primary care facilities.

Third, there is also a need to consider **telemedicine and remote support** as important aspects of health services that could play a pivotal role in early detection and treatment.

Fourth, the government must ensure that **social security programmes** are duly implemented. They work towards prevention of modifiable risk factors like malnutrition, poverty etc. This would possibly pay richer dividends than an exclusive focus on 'medicalising' the disease.

Fifth, the government must build an **open and collaborative forum** where all stakeholders, especially affected communities and independent experts, take a lead role.

Conclusion

It's time to acknowledge the magnitude of the disease, and work harder at offering individuals equitable healthcare access and resources that the disease warrants. Collective effort is desired at local, national and international level to attain SDG 3.3 which aims to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases by 2030.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Comparison of National Pension Scheme with Old Pension System – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The National Pension Scheme (NPS) was introduced on January 1, 2004 for all employees of the Union Government appointed on or after this date. Most State governments also adopted this scheme for their staff. However, some states are having a re-think and planning to revert to the old pension scheme, which is an unfunded 'pay as you go' scheme. Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have already reverted to the old pension scheme. Some political parties are demanding the same in Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh and Telangana.

What was the old pension 'Pay As You Go' (PAYG) scheme?

Prior to 2004, India had the PAYG plan where the beneficiaries decided how much they wanted to contribute either by having the specified amount regularly deducted or by contributing a lump sum amount. Under this, the entire pension amount was borne by the government while fixed returns were guaranteed for employee contribution to the General Provident Fund (GPF). Governments paid 50% of the last drawn salary plus DA as pension to employees after retiring, and half of that to their eligible dependent family members in case of death. Minimum pension was Rs 9,000.

What is the National Pension Scheme (NPS)?

The PFRDA Act of 2013 defines the NPS as a **contributory pension scheme** whereby contribution from a subscriber and a matching contribution from the government is collected and accumulated in an individual account.

The proposal to move from **the defined benefit scheme (DB) to a defined contribution scheme (DC)** had been under consideration of the Government since the mid-1990s. NPS was **introduced in 2004** and **made mandatory** for central government employees as well as staff of those state governments which adopted this scheme. However, It is voluntary for the workforce in the unorganized sector. At present, 10% of basic pay and dearness allowance (DA) is deducted as a voluntary contribution towards it.

What is the current status of National Pension Scheme?

All states have migrated to the NPS, except for West Bengal and Tamil Nadu since adoption had to be done on a voluntary basis. However, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have moved back to the old scheme recently.

As per SBI report, **there are around 55 lakh state government employees** enrolled in NPS as of now. It further noted that the yearly contribution of the state government employees is in excess of Rs 2.5 lakh crore for this financial year.

However, it says that asset growth has been affected by the Ukraine-Russia conflict and may fall short of the Rs 7.5 lakh crore declared target by March 2022 this year.

Why did the government introduce National Pension Scheme?

Coverage: The older pension schemes covered only around 12% of the total workforce, leaving nearly 88% of workers without any pension coverage.

Fiscal Burden: The PAYG scheme was proving too expensive and there were apprehensions that it would sooner than later become fiscally unsustainable. The Fifth Pay Commission (2006) gave a liberal award which further increased expenditure on pensions. Since most state governments also adopt a similar salary and pension structure, **state finances also come under stress**. The expenditure on Union civil service pensions was estimated to be 2.31% of the GDP in 2004-05. Economists at the India Pension Research Foundation estimated (in 2005) that the implicit pension debt of the Government of India worked out to about 56% of the GDP. In other words, PAYG would have become fiscally unsustainable for the Governments.

Future Commitments: It was felt that pension liabilities of the governments will go up even more in future. This would happen due to improvement in life expectancy, periodical additions to dearness allowance and linking of pension to prevailing levels of salaries. Moreover, many economists have criticized the PAYG scheme as putting the burden on future generation because under PAYG, contributions of the current generation of workers were explicitly used to pay the pensions of pensioners. Hence, a PAYG scheme involved **direct transfer of resources from the current generation of tax payers to fund the pensioners**.

Disincentivize Early Retirement: The old scheme used to incentivize early retirement as the pension was fixed at the last drawn salary. This early retirement resulted in under-utilization of human resources by the government.

How does NPS ensure safety and security of employees' contribution?

NPS is so designed that a subscriber can ensure that her investment is safe and secure.

The contributions to the NPS are managed by professional fund managers like the LIC, ICICI etc. The fund managers are **selected through a transparent and competitive process**. NPS **allows the subscriber to choose her fund manager and her preferred investment option** including a 100% government bond option. A guaranteed return option could also be considered to provide an assured annuity.

An **NPS Trust** has also been constituted to **regularly oversee performance of fund managers** with a trustee bank to efficiently manage fund flows. A **custodian has also been appointed** to hold the securities with subscribers being beneficial owners of the assets.

This arrangement has been working well for over a decade now.

Why are some States switching to the old pension model?

Market Uncertainty: There is an apprehension in certain sections of the staff that the new NPS will not deliver the same benefits as the old scheme. They believe that their money will not be safe in the hands of fund managers considering the market uncertainty and they might get a very low amount of pension.

Growing Resentment: There has been a constant demand from those who joined government services that the 'contributory pension' scheme introduced in 2004 be reversed to the 'defined pension' scheme. Resentment against the new scheme has been simmering and breaks out in mass protests now and then.

Reducing burden on Employees: Under the old scheme, all the burden is being borne by the government and employees get greater disposable income in their hands along with an assurance of pension.

Attracting Good Talent: The uncertainty regarding NPS may discourage many talented youth to enter into the government sector considering a rise in salaries and other benefits offered by the private sector in the future.

Populist measure: Some experts are calling it a populist measure as employees are a very vocal and an important pressure group. They are also the people who implement government policies and programmes, and widespread disgruntlement amongst them can have an adverse impact on the outcomes.

What should be done?

First, Considering the non viability of old pension schemes, a former Union Finance Secretary has recommended that **the government should design an 'assured pension' scheme.** This should combine elements of both the defined and the contributory pension schemes.

Second, the future pay commissions should move towards the concept of **"cost to company" (C-to-C)** and include the cost of assured pension while determining pay revisions.

Third, the government should also **revisit the structure of the civil services** to ensure that the organizations don't become 'top heavy' over time, as they have now.

Fourth, until a new scheme is created, focus should be on reforming the NPS as per **CAG 2018 recommendations:** (a) A foolproof system needs to be put in place to ensure all nodal offices and eligible employees are registered under NPS; (b) Delays need to be penalized and compensation affected to avoid loss to the subscriber, (c) Government to ensure that rules on the service matters are in place for the government NPS subscribers.

Conclusion

The experience so far has been that NPS has given good returns and many experts believe that the annuity is likely to be as attractive as in the old pension scheme, if not better. However, another set of experts criticize NPS due to its uncertainty. There is no doubt that old pension system will prove to be fiscally unsustainable. Thus current scenario warrants reforming NPS and providing a greater degree of assurance to the subscribers.

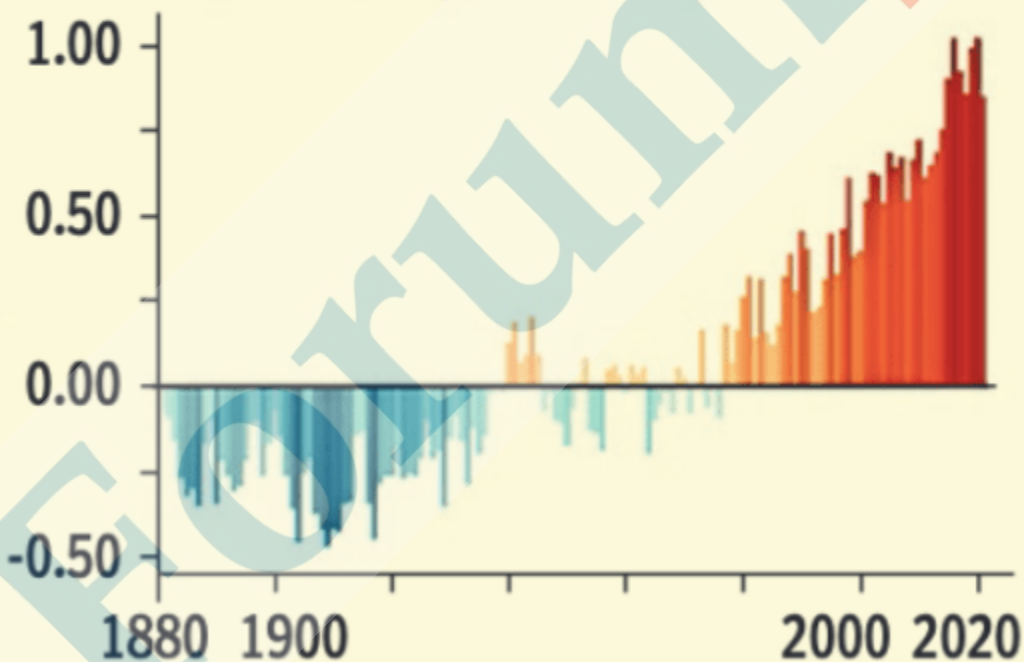
Source: [The Times of India](#), [The Times of India](#), [The Times of India](#)

Heat Waves: Rising Frequency and Intensity – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

The IPCC data show that the atmospheric CO₂ concentrations today are higher than at any time in the prior two million years. The temperatures today have exceeded those in the last 6,500 years. Gentler summers have been replaced by intense heat waves. In 2003, Europe experienced 47°C. In 2016, India witnessed 51. 0°C and in 2021, Canada experienced 49. 6°C. In 2022, Antarctica is 40°C hotter than usual. This rising intensity of heat waves causes a significant impact on health, assets and stability of the world. The situation warrants enhanced engagement of communities and nations in order to duly tackle the approaching danger of heat waves.

OUR HEATED HISTORY

From 2015 onwards, we are experiencing the warmest years on modern record, with 2021 joining 2016, 2019 and 2020 as the hottest years ever



Data Courtesy: NASA Earth Observatory

Source: The Times of India

What are heat waves?

According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), a Heat wave occurs if the maximum temperature of a station reaches at least 40°C or more for Plains and at least 30°C or more for Hilly regions. There are other criteria as well:

(a) Based on Departure from Normal Temperature

Heat Wave: Departure from normal is 4.5°C to 6.4°C

Severe Heat Wave: Departure from normal is >6.4°C

(b) Based on Actual Maximum Temperature

Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature $\geq 45^{\circ}\text{C}$

Severe Heat Wave: When actual maximum temperature $\geq 47^{\circ}\text{C}$

Heat Wave is declared if above criteria are met in at least 2 stations in a Meteorological subdivision for at least two consecutive days.

What is the scenario of heat waves in India?

A recent study by the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), has found a spatial shift of heatwaves in India.

The study has **found a warming pattern over northwestern and southern India**, while a **progressive cooling phase over northeastern and southwest regions** of the country.

The study found **three prominent heatwave prone regions: Northwestern, Central, and South-central India**, with the highest being in **west Madhya Pradesh** (0.80 events/year).

The study has also found a **significant decrease in heat waves over the eastern region**, that is Gangetic West Bengal (-0.13 events/year).

The study has also found severe heatwave events have shown a “southward expansion and a spatial surge during the decades of 2001–2010 and 2010–2016”. The **increase in heatwaves in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu** are particularly significant and will increase in the future.

What are the reasons behind the increasing frequency of Heat Waves?

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: The primary driver is rising greenhouse gas emissions and the consequent change in the entire climate system. Due to enhanced global warming, scientists expect greater occurrence of heat waves which would have a more significant impact on Arctic and Antarctic ecosystems.

Erratic Nature of Monsoon: Many experts have deduced that rising instances of unusually long dry phases during Monsoons mean that soil moisture drops to a remarkably low level. This reinforces the heat waves.

Urbanization: The urban centres are full of concrete structures that **enhance the occurrence of heat waves and create an urban heat island effect**. The materials used to build cities like asphalt, concrete, bricks and other supplies are very dense in their composition. Further the darker colors used to paint the buildings also absorb and retain short-wave radiation from the sun.

Similarly, the configuration of buildings in cities also results in heat waves. When big buildings are amassed along a waterway, like in Mumbai and other coastal cities, the wind coming off the

waterway can get blocked. Also, when buildings are placed close together, they reduce the convective movement of air which makes it to stagnate and heat.

Demand for Air Conditioning: With a rise in temperature and an enhancement of per capita income of masses, a rise in installation and usage of air conditioners is witnessed in residential and commercial spaces. This provides temporary cooling inside but enhances the outside temperature thereby increasing occurrence of heat waves.

What are the impacts of Heat Waves?

Human Health: The 2015 heat wave caused a massive loss of life in India, around 2,500 deaths by various estimates. Excessive Heat impacts peoples' quality of life, harms those who suffer from respiratory and cardiovascular conditions and exacerbates asthma in children, affecting their ability to develop in a healthy way.

Economic Loss: An ILO study says that at at 34°C, workers can lose up to 50% of their work capacity. Currently, US\$ 41 trillion in GDP is at risk from heat stress globally. By 2030, heat productivity loss could equal 80 million full-time jobs and US\$ 2,400 billion, impacting tropical countries like India the most.

Loss of labor productivity would impact **agriculture, construction, fisheries, forestry**; sectors which are primarily outdoor and demand heavy effort.

Creation of Heat Domes: Some scientists believe that there exists a positive correlation between rising temperatures and creation of heat domes. A Heat Dome is created when an area of high pressure stays over the same area for days or even weeks, trapping very warm air underneath – rather like a lid on a pot.

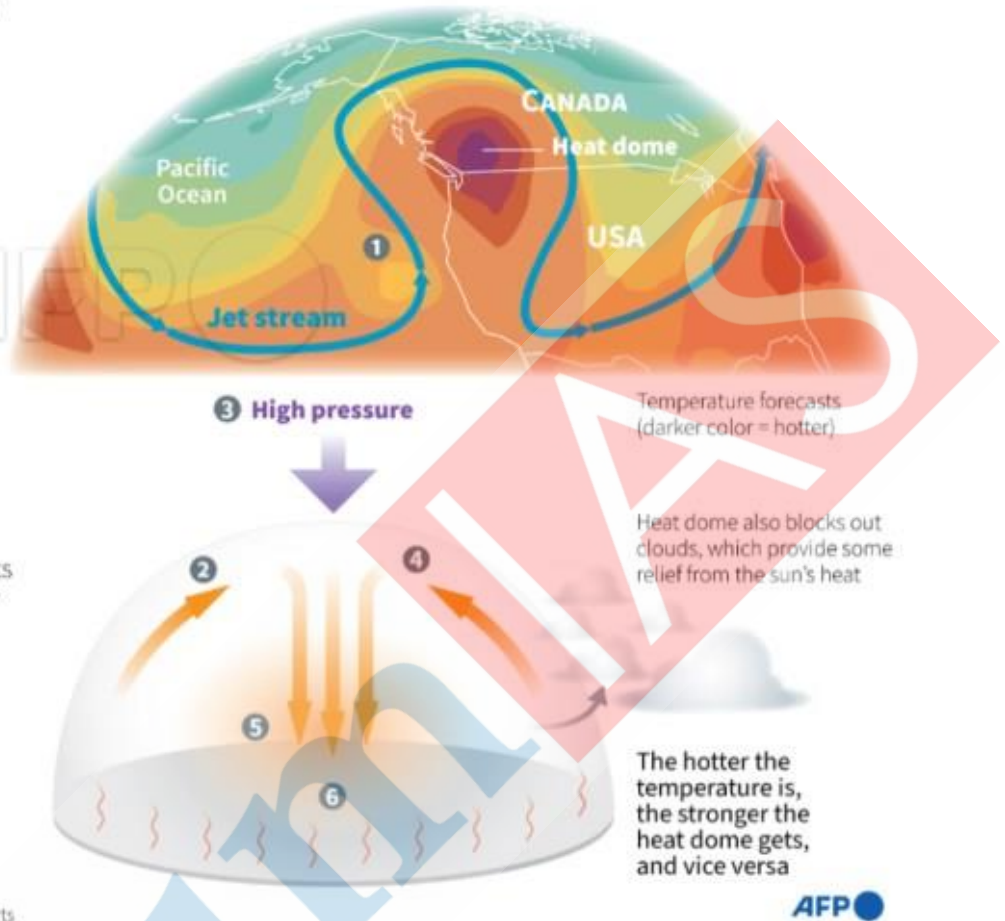
When the heat dome phenomenon kicks in – railway tracks buckle, electricity lines melt and roadways crack.

The 'heat dome'

Occurs when the atmosphere traps hot ocean air like a lid or cap

- 1 In summer, the **jet stream** (which moves the air) shifts northward
- 2 Hot and stagnant air **expands** upwards
- 3 Strong and **high-pressure** atmospheric conditions combine with influences from La Nina act like a dome or cap
- 4 In a process known as **convection**, hot air attempts to escape but high pressure pushes it back down
- 5 Under the dome, the air **sinks and compresses**, releasing more heat
- 6 As winds move the hot air east, the jet stream traps the air where it sinks, resulting in **heat waves**

Source: NOAA/US/Canada medias, experts



Source: AFP

Cascading Extremes: A hot and dry weather extreme causes more evaporation from plants and soil which means a more rapid drying-out of the surface. A dry surface emits more heat and increases temperatures in the atmosphere. So, a heatwave can bring 'cascading extremes', triggering the next damaging weather phenomenon like a drought.

Food Security: The rise in heat waves will increase probability of droughts, decrease labor productivity and enhance demand of water in a scenario of decreasing groundwater levels. All this would brutally impact agriculture production and deter food security.

What are the future projections for India?

Global warming is going to exacerbate the situation.

In India specifically, there is the **possibility of amplifying impacts associated with transitional climate zones** that change from the aridity of Rajasthan to the more humid east. These zones are **very sensitive to climatic changes** — these areas go very green in the event of good rain and turn extremely brown when facing dry heat. This would mean greater loss of green cover in the transition zones.

So, India will see an increase in temperature in general and witness a greater intensity due to its peculiar climatic zones.

What should be done?

First, there is a need to **acknowledge the fact that heat waves disproportionately impact the poor, diseased and old people**. Thus focusing on these groups to ensure that they are getting enough hydration and ventilation can help in reducing the impact of heat waves.

Second, the masses should be **encouraged to adopt more energy efficient solutions** like using desert coolers in place of air conditioners in dry areas. For this, collaboration with environmental NGOs like Greenpeace can be extremely helpful.

Third, production of energy should be done using **clean and renewable resources** as the thermal and fossil based production releases a significant amount of greenhouse gasses. Proper implementation of National Solar Mission, National Wind energy policy etc. initiatives are desired for this.

Fourth, the nations should **focus on creating more and more green spaces** as they are a panacea for heat waves. The UN noted that investing US\$ 100 million in street trees globally can bring 77 million people a 1°C temperature reduction. Restoring Seoul's Cheonggyecheon stream lowered the temperature by 5.9°C.

Fifth, while renewable energy generation must increase, **the nations should also focus on smaller mitigation measures** like air vents below roofs, painting surfaces albedo or pale shades and heat-sensitive window placements on buildings.

Sixth, the government should also take **proactive steps for the workers** who would be facing productivity loss. This involves giving them protective gear to wear in order to lower heat exposure and allowing regular rest and water breaks during the day.

Conclusion

The UNEP data show humans face 220 million more heatwave exposures now than in 1986. The situation is alarming and going to get worse in future. Countries can tackle the menace of heat waves only when they collaborate and cooperate on climate change. The rising frequency and intensity of heat waves is a reminder to the world that proactive and not reactive measures are needed immediately.

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

India's Exports Reach US\$ 400 billion: Reasons, Challenges and Way Ahead – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

The value of India's exports in the FY2021-22 hit \$400 billion in March 2022 which is the highest till date and is expected to reach US\$ 410 billion by the end of the month. It adds another feather in the cap of the Indian Economy and shows its potential to serve the global market. Some experts have lauded this achievement while others have expressed caution that this growth is a result of an unmet demand that was accumulating during the pandemic. Nevertheless, crossing the threshold of US\$ 400 billion is significant achievement.

What is the current status of India's Exports?

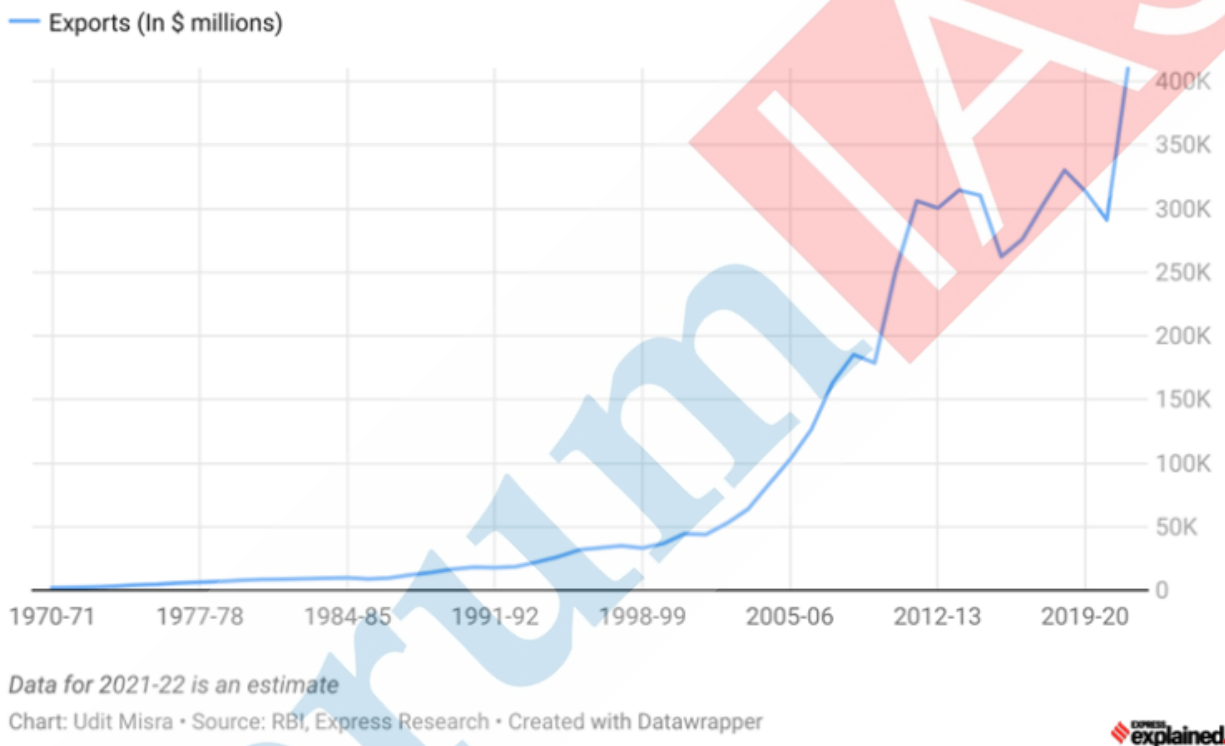
According to data from the Reserve Bank of India, outbound merchandise trade had clocked US\$ 303.5 billion in 2017-18, US\$ 330.1 billion in 2018-19 before slipping to US\$ 313.4 billion in 2019-20. The numbers in 2019-20 were slightly dented due to the harsh national lockdowns imposed in the last week of that financial year. The exports fell to US\$ 292 billion in FY2020-21

due to the pandemic. However, a swift recovery was witnessed in FY2021-22, with exports **crossing US\$ 400 billion** in March 2022.

Exports have registered a 37% increase compared to the previous fiscal and 21% over the previous record high of exports of US\$ 330 billion set in FY2018-19. Engineering exports have jumped 46.5% to cross US\$ 100 billion for the first time. Chemicals, cotton yarn, handloom products, and the apparel industry have also done well.

India had significantly boosted exports to key trading partners with outbound shipments to the UAE increasing by 65% during the fiscal and exports to the US increasing by 46%.

India's goods exports soar in value terms



Source: Indian Express

What are the reasons behind the surge in Exports?

Rise in Prices: Higher prices of commodities and oil helped drive up the value of exports, with petroleum products exports jumping over 141%.

Diversification in global economy: Many countries shifted their global procurement preferences to diversify their dependence on China following the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus e.g., Australia, which is in the midst of a shrill trade battle with China, has made way for India, taking India's exports to Australia up 94% so far this year.

Unmet Global Demand: Another reason for such a huge rise could be the pent-up global demand that was unmet during major waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Monetary Policies of countries: Expansionary monetary policy by developed economies in response to the economic impact of the pandemic has also boosted demand for Indian exports.

What is the significance of rising exports?

Resilience Capabilities: India has managed to achieve its export target despite supply disruptions due to the pandemic, the challenging shortages of shipping containers and surging freight rates.

Huge Growth Potential: The rise in exports shows the huge magnitude of growth that India can generate with the right vision and inputs. The ~40% growth in FY2021-22 compared to 2020-21 would be India's fastest export growth rate since 2009-10.

Annual growth rate of India's goods exports



2021-22 is an estimate

Chart: Udit Misra • Source: RBI • Created with Datawrapper

explained

Source: Indian Express

Further, many goods like auto components, motor vehicles, cereal preparations, buffalo meat, rice etc. saw increases in overall export volumes despite stagnant or declining commodity prices.

Atmanirbhar Bharat: A surge in export shows India's rising might in manufacturing of goods thereby moving closer to the vision of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and achieving self reliance.

Attracting Foreign Investment: Rising exports signify the potential of a nation to serve the global market. This capability attracts a lot of foreign investment and helps in surging a nation's foreign exchange reserves e.g., India's export potential has played a pivotal role in creating the current corpus of US\$ 620 billion dollar forex reserves.

Target Completion: The FY2021-22 reflects the first time in several years that the country has met its exports target. In the last few years, India was not able to achieve its intended target but this scenario has been altered in 2021-22.

What steps have been taken to promote exports?

Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20: It provides a framework for increasing exports of goods and services as well as generation of employment and increasing value addition in the country, keeping in mind the vision of 'Make in India'.

Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) Scheme: It is a new scheme that is applicable with effect from January 1st, 2021, formed to replace the existing MEIS (Merchandise Exports from India Scheme). The scheme will ensure that the exporters receive the refunds on the embedded taxes and duties previously non-recoverable. Mandi tax, VAT, Coal cess, Central Excise duty on fuel etc. will now be refunded under this particular scheme.

Niryat Bandhu Scheme: It was launched with an objective to reach out to the new and potential exporters including exporters from Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It aimed to mentor them through orientation programmes, counseling sessions, individual facilitation, etc., on various aspects of foreign trade.

Common Digital Platform for Certificate of Origin: It has been launched to facilitate trade and increase Free Trade Agreement (FTA) utilization by exporters.

Districts as Export Hubs: It aims at identifying products with export potential in each district, addressing bottlenecks for exporting these products and supporting local exporters/manufacturers to generate employment in the district.

Read More: [Government approves continuation of the National Export Insurance Account \(NEIA\) scheme](#)

What are some of the concerns that need to be addressed?

Competition from Neighbors: India hopes to consolidate the gains and establish its credentials as a credible alternative to China. However, it could face stiff competition in some sectors from Asian peers such as Vietnam and Bangladesh especially in the labor intensive sectors e.g., Bangladesh poses significant competition in the Jute Textile sector.

Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The prolongation of the crisis will keep on driving the oil prices that may enhance cost of production in India which would in turn enhance the price of exporters. This rise in export price may reduce demand for Indian products and make them uncompetitive. The crisis has also resulted in **high shipping rates, container shortages and re-alignment of trade routes around the Black Sea** that has enhanced the hardships of Indian Exporters.

Monetary Tightening: As the situation of Pandemic normalizes, the developed world would do monetary tightening by raising interest rates. This may suck out dollars from emerging markets and create a financial crunch for companies.

Inward Looking stance of Nations: The COVID-19 pandemic has induced an inward-looking shift in nations. They are now focusing on enhancing domestic production and reducing the reliance on imports. This would eventually hamper Indian exports.

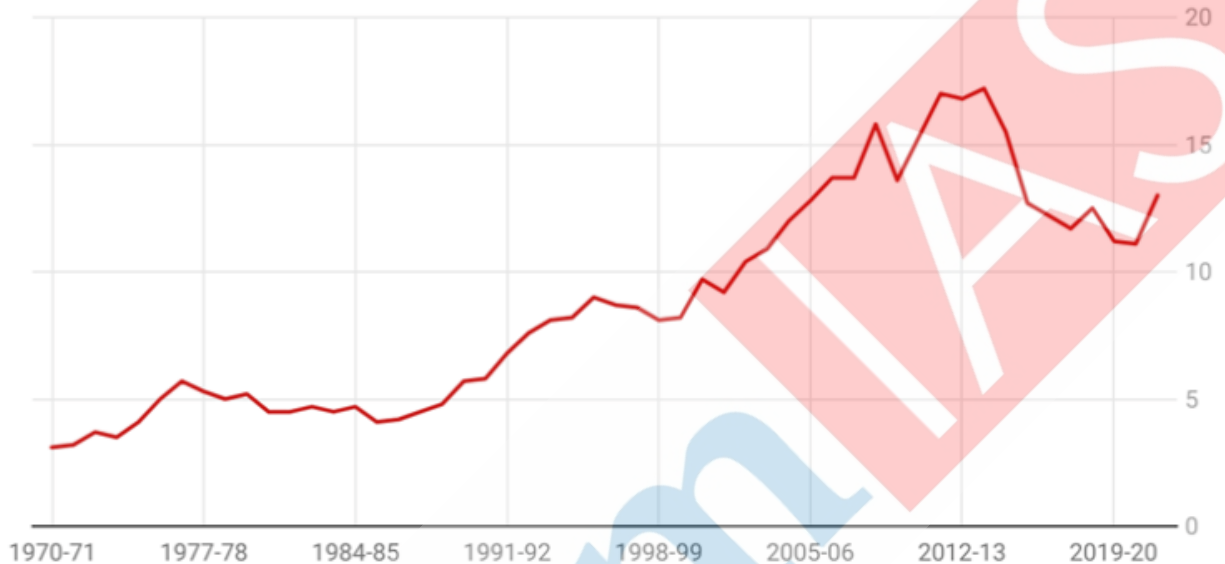
Delays in Governance: The red tapism and unenthusiastic attitude of bureaucrats creates unnecessary delays which impacts exporting potential of India. e.g., a parliamentary committee has urged the government to include Special Economic Zones and sectors such as pharma, steel, and chemicals under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) Scheme. This finally kicked off last year after a significant delay.

Exports as share of GDP: While the exports have achieved a new high, their proportion as a share of GDP still has a scope of lot of improvement. In FY2021-22, exports are ~14% of the GDP,

below the high achieved in 2012-13 at 17%. A 17% share of exports today would have meant exports worth US\$ 485 billion. Exports have 19% share in the Chinese economy (China's highest share was ~36% in 2006)

But, as a percentage of GDP, they are far below the peak

— Exports as % of GDP



Data for 2021-22 is an estimate

Chart: Udit Misra • Source: RBI, Express Research • Created with Datawrapper



Source: Indian Express

Read More: [Increasing exports in India and challenges in exports- Explained, pointwise](#)

What lies ahead?

First, many economists expect the rupee to weaken over 2022-23, which in turn could be a **minor perk** for exporters.

Second, India should **grab on opportunities that are created by the Russia-Ukraine crisis** e.g., experts believe that the crisis may create opportunities for Indian farm produce exports, especially for crops like wheat and maize.

Third, a swift conclusion of **Free Trade Agreement pacts** being negotiated with countries like the U.K., Australia and Canada could create easier market access in these large markets.

Fourth, there should be a **timely review of India's Foreign trade policy** in order to provide a better environment for doing exports. Exporters await a long-overdue revision of the Foreign Trade Policy for 2015-20, which has now been extended into the first few months of 2022-23.

Fifth, apart from focusing on boosting exports, **focus should also be on reducing imports** in order to stabilize the rising trade deficit. India's imports have shot up to record levels and could end up ~US\$ 600 billion compared to 2020-21's import figure of \$393.6 billion. The trade deficit

for the year could be around US\$ 190 billion, sharply higher than the US\$ 102 billion recorded in the pandemic year.

Conclusion

The achievement of US\$ 400 billion of exports is a major milestone for the Indian economy. However, many experts have rightly opined to be cautious. According to UNCTAD estimates, the positive trend for international trade in 2021 (calendar year) was largely the result of **increases in commodity prices, subsiding pandemic restrictions** and a **strong recovery in demand** due to economic stimulus packages. As these trends are likely to abate, international trade trends are expected to normalize during 2022. It is during this time the true picture might emerge and analysts will be able to undertake better analysis.

Source: [The Hindu](#), [Indian Express](#), [Indian Express](#), [PIB](#)

5th BIMSTEC Summit – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The 5th Bay of Bengal Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit would occur on 30th March 2022 in a virtual mode and hosted by Sri Lanka, the current BIMSTEC chair. To prepare for the Summit, meetings of BIMSTEC Senior Officials (SOM) took place on 28 March 2022 followed by meetings of the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers (BMM) on 29 March 2022. The summit on March 30 will be a completely virtual affair, largely because of concerns among member states about the situation in Myanmar following last year's military coup. Some member states, including India, were reluctant to share a platform with Myanmar's junta, which has shown no signs of moving the country back towards democracy.

What is BIMSTEC?

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization that was established on 06 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration. Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation), the organization is now known as BIMSTEC.

It comprises seven Member States with the admission of Myanmar on 22 December 1997, and Bhutan and Nepal in February 2004. It is headquartered at Dhaka, Bangladesh.

It not only connects South and Southeast Asia, but also the ecologies of the Great Himalayas and the Bay of Bengal. It aims to create an enabling environment for economic development; accelerate social progress and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.

What are the expectations from the current summit?

BIMSTEC Charter: The adoption of rules, a framework and long-term goals is expected to streamline the operations of BIMSTEC and allow the organization to finally deliver on its potential.

It will help BIMSTEC to become a dynamic and productive regional organization through meaningful cooperation between the members.

BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity: It is a vision for implementing multimodal connectivity projects for greater regional integration. It will seek to combine shipping routes with road transport for the movement of people and cargo.

What have been the achievements of BIMSTEC?

BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate: The Memorandum of Association (MoA) on the establishment of this centre was signed in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 4 March 2014 at the Third BIMSTEC Summit. Currently the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate Change functions from the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.

BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC): The First BIMSTEC Energy Ministers Conference held on 04 October 2005, agreed to the setting up of a BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC). It aims to share experience in reforms, restructuring, regulation and best practice in the energy sector.

The **BIMSTEC Permanent Secretariat** was opened in 2014 at Dhaka. It helps in better management of regional issues.

BIMSTEC Permanent Working Committee (BPWC) to deal with administrative and financial matters of the Secretariat was set up post the 4th Kathmandu summit of 2018.

BIMSTEC convention on cooperation in combating international terrorism, transnational organised crime and illicit drug trafficking has come into force in March 2021. It encourages data sharing and intelligence gathering on criminal activities.

What is the significance of BIMSTEC?

Alternative to SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) has largely become defunct because of differences between New Delhi and Islamabad. Further the operability of the grouping has again come under peril considering the declining security situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

Strategic Location: The Bay region is a key transit route between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Therefore BIMSTEC as a grouping can help in ensuring freedom of navigation in the waters. It can also help in harnessing and sharing the Bay's natural wealth.

Combating the web of uncertainties: The institution can help member states tackle future uncertainties that will arise due to climate change, COVID – 19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Tackling Security Challenges: Members of the grouping face several traditional and non-traditional security challenges that can be duly addressed with enhanced cooperation.

In this regard, NSAs of members have met thrice since 2017 and are collaborating on counter-terrorism, intelligence-sharing, coastal security, cybersecurity etc.

Development of North East: BIMSTEC can boost the development of the northeast region by providing greater interaction with Bangladesh and Myanmar. For instance, the master plan of connectivity includes the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway and Kolkata-Siliguri-Guwahati-Imphal link.

Better cooperation with ASEAN: India has already come out of RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) agreement that may hinder its trade potential. Therefore a more robust cooperation with Thailand and Myanmar can help in resolving India – ASEAN differences and ensure better implementation of 'Act East Policy'.

What are the challenges faced by BIMSTEC?

Stalemate on Agreements: The Free Trade Agreement (FTA), coastal shipping agreement and motor vehicles agreement have undergone numerous negotiations but no consensus is developed over them.

Priority to Bilateralism: The focus remains primarily on enhancing bilateral ties, with multilateralism yet to gain ground despite common ecological concerns and a shared past.

Big brother attitude: Allegations are made on India for playing a dominant role in the organization and neglecting the agendas of small states.

Irregularity in working: The summits are not held on regular intervals and slow pace is observed in working. For instance, it took almost 17 years to establish a permanent secretariat.

Preference to other organizations: Countries like Myanmar and Thailand show more enthusiasm towards ASEAN and neglects the vision of BIMSTEC.

Resource Deficit: Lack of adequate financial and manpower resources is impairing the performance of the body. Although, India is the largest contributor and contributes annually about 32% of the budget.

What lies ahead?

First, it is expected that the BIMSTEC charter would be adopted by member states on 30th March, 2022. However, the countries must not rest on this achievement and instead move on to 'next steps' that can be taken to further strengthen BIMSTEC.

Second, the members must accelerate our efforts to boost intra BIMSTEC trade and economic ties.

They should focus on developing a network of regional supply chains that will reduce our vulnerability to external shocks and give their economies greater resilience and transparency.

Third, India must encourage other member states to consider joining the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). This will enhance disaster cooperation as all the BIMSTEC members live in one of the most disaster prone regions of the world.

Fourth, the members states cannot ignore the challenges that transnational crime, terrorism, violent extremism or indeed new challenges such as cyber-attacks, pose to them.

Considering this, they need to put in place the remaining elements of the legal architecture that will enable their law enforcement agencies to collaborate more closely and more effectively.

Fifth, the group should move forward by doing 'institutional hedging'. This means focus should be on developing collective soft as well as hard power for the group. Thereby protecting individual interests and shaping up a regional order that works for all the members involved.

Sixth, India should project itself as a compatriot and an equal partner to other BIMSTEC member-countries. This will help reduce its trust deficit and ensure better integration in the region.

Conclusion

BIMSTEC over the years has emerged as a promising sub-regional grouping with growing strategic and economic interests of the member states as well as of the international community in the Bay of Bengal region. India remains committed to further building the momentum of regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework and make the organization stronger, vibrant, more effective and result-oriented.

Sources: [Hindustan Times](#), [Ministry of External Affairs](#), [Indian Express](#)

Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill: Features, Benefits and Concerns – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 28, 2022. The Bill allows the police to collect, store and analyze physical and biological samples of certain persons. The government has come up with the new Bill to aid the investigation process and improve the law and order situation of the country. However many experts have expressed concerns over the Bill, particularly its conflict with the right to privacy and expansion of state's surveillance powers.

What is the background?

The Bill **replaces the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920**. The Act authorized the collection of certain identifiable information about specified persons (such as convicts) for investigation of crime. The Bill expands the definition of persons whose details can be taken as well as the ambit of such details. It authorizes the National Crime Records Bureau to collect, store, and preserve these details.

How is the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill different from the earlier act?

Coverage: According to the Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920, certain persons (like those convicted of offenses punishable by minimum 1 year of rigorous imprisonment) were required to give photographs and specified details.

The Bill widens the ambit of such persons to include **all convicts** (convicted of an offense punishable under any law for the time being in force), **arrested persons**, as well as **persons detained under any preventive detention law**.

Quantum of Details: The Identification of Prisoners Act permits the collection of photographs and specified details about convicts and other persons including finger impressions and footprint impressions. The Bill expands the list of details that can be collected. It will now include: **(a)** Palm-print impressions; **(b)** Iris and retina scans; **(c)** Behavioral attributes such as signature and handwriting; **(d)** Other physical and biological samples such as blood, semen, hair samples, and swabs, and their analysis.

Persons authorized to collect details: Under the Act, details may be collected by police officers who: **(a)** Are in charge of a police station; **(b)** Conduct investigation under the CrPC, or **(c)** Are at least at the rank of a Sub-Inspector.

The Bill permits the collection of details about specified persons by either **a prison officer** (not below the rank of Head Warder), or **a police officer** (in charge of a police station, or at least at the rank of a Head Constable).

Power to make Rules: The Identification of Prisoners Act vested rule-making power only in the State government. The Bill extends this power to the Union government as well. The Union or State government may make rules on various matters, including: **(a)** the manner of collecting details, and **(b)** the manner of collection, storage, preservation, destruction, dissemination, and disposal of details by NCRB.

What are the other key features of the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill?

Retention of details: The Bill requires the **details collected to be retained in digital or electronic form for 75 years** from the date of collection. The record may be destroyed in case of persons who: **(a)** Have not been previously convicted; **(b)** Are released without trial, discharged,

or acquitted by the Court, after exhausting all legal remedies. A Court or a Magistrate may direct the retention of details in the case of such persons after recording reasons in writing.

Resistance to giving details: As per the Bill, resistance or refusal to give details will be considered an offense under the Indian Penal Code, 1860. In such cases, police officers or prison officers may collect details in the manner prescribed under Rules made by the State government or the Union government. The furnishing of details is mandatory in case of crimes against women and children or offences punishable with a minimum 7 years of imprisonment.

Role of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB): The Bill empowers NCRB to collect the details about the persons covered under the Bill from State governments, Union Territory (UT) administrations, or other law enforcement agencies. Other functions of NCRB under the Bill include: **(a)** Storing and destroying the details about specified persons at the national level; **(b)** Processing the details with relevant criminal records; **(c)** Disseminating the details to law enforcement agencies.

What is the significance of the new Bill ?

Aiding Investigative agencies: It will enable the use of modern techniques to capture and record appropriate information. This would aid the investigative agencies, resulting in faster completion of trials.

Maintenance of Law and Order: Faster adjudication of cases and certainty of punishment will enhance the law and order situation in the country.

Voluntary Nature: Arrested persons will not be obliged to give their biological samples unless they have committed an offense against a woman or a child, or an offense punishable with a minimum of seven years of imprisonment.

Cooperative Federalism: The Bill extends rule making power in the hands of the Union government as well, while earlier it was only with the State government. This will help in strengthening cooperative federalism between the Union and states.

Flexibility: Apart from NCRB, State governments and UT administrations may notify agencies to collect, preserve and share details about specified persons in their respective jurisdictions.

What are the concerns associated with the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill?

Lack of Clarity: Several provisions are not defined in the Bill. For instance, the statement of objects says it provides for collection of measurements for “convicts and other persons” but the expression “other persons” is not defined. It does include ‘those accused of certain offenses’, but it can be argued that the police could use the law to expand it to others.

Excessive State Surveillance: The proposed Bill brings a legal framework for police surveillance using technology, but experts fear that it could be expanded or misused.

Violation of Fundamental Rights: Some experts have argued that it violates fundamental rights of citizens including the right to privacy. The Bill states “increasing the conviction rate” as one of its aims. However experts believe it would not pass the 3 three-fold test of K.S Puttaswamy v Union of India case, which recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right. The 3 parameters are **(a)** The activity must be backed by a law; **(b)** The State must have a legitimate interest in the subject to bring such a law that collides with fundamental rights; **(c)** The State’s infringement must be proportional to its aim.

The proposed law will also be debated against Article 20(3) of the Constitution, which is a fundamental right that guarantees the right against self-incrimination. It states that “no person accused of any offense shall be compelled to be a witness against himself.”

What lies ahead?

First, the modalities of collection, storage or use of data will be prescribed in rules by the government and are not outlined in the Bill. This should be duly formulated and put in public domain for discussion and deliberation.

Second, given that policing is a state subject, it remains to be seen if any States refuse to share the information with NCRB. If this happens, then the objective of the new Bill would not be achieved.

Third, the Bill could be challenged in courts and hence the government should be **prepared to satisfy the 3 fold privacy test**.

Fourth, the government should also **formulate data protection law** as recommended by the B.N Srikrishna Committee. This will reduce privacy breaches and provide more clarity on the right to be forgotten. It is necessary as the Bill also brings to focus rights of prisoners and the right to be forgotten since biometric data can be stored for 75 years.

Conclusion

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill says that new “measurement” techniques being used in advanced countries are giving credible and reliable results. However, it can be considered useful in India only when it is in synchronization with the fundamental rights of citizens.

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

The Assam-Meghalaya Boundary Dispute Resolution – Explained, pointwise**Introduction**

Two months after signing a draft resolution on January 29, Assam and Meghalaya partially resolved a 50-year-old dispute along their 884.9 km boundary on 29th March 2022. It was facilitated by the Union Home Minister who urged the States to resolve their boundary disputes by August 15, 2022, when the country celebrates 75 years of Independence. The agreement is expected to pave the way for resolving disputes in the remaining sectors of the Assam-Meghalaya boundary and similar areas of difference between Assam and three other northeastern States.

What is the background of the dispute?

Meghalaya was carved out of Assam as an autonomous State in 1972. The creation of the new State was based on the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act of 1969. However the Meghalaya government refused to accept this Act as areas of the present-day East Jaintia Hills, Ri-Bhoi and West Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya were transferred to the Karbi Anglong, Kamrup (metro) and Kamrup districts of Assam.

Meghalaya contested these transfers after statehood, claiming that **they belonged to its tribal chieftains**. Assam said the Government of Meghalaya could neither provide documents nor archival materials to prove its claim over these areas. After claims and counter-claims, the dispute was **narrowed down to 12 sectors** on the basis of an official claim by Meghalaya in 2011.

What steps have been taken by Assam and Meghalaya to solve the dispute?

1983: First serious attempt to solve the boundary issue took place with the formation of a **joint official committee**. It suggested that the Survey of India should re-delineate the boundary with the cooperation of both the States towards settling the dispute. However there was no follow-up action.

1985: An independent panel headed by Justice Y.V. Chandrachud was formed over the issue and submitted its report in 1987. However, the report was rejected by the Meghalaya Government which considered the report to be Pro-Assam.

1991: Following more disputes and resultant violence, the two governments agreed in January 1991 to jointly demarcate the border with the help of the Survey of India. About 100 km of the border was demarcated by the end of 1991, but Meghalaya found the exercise unconstitutional and refused to cooperate.

2011: The Meghalaya Assembly passed a resolution for central intervention and the constitution of a boundary commission. The Assam Assembly retaliated with a resolution to oppose the move. But the Centre made the two governments appoint nodal officers to discuss the boundary dispute to minimize the points of differences.

2019: The Meghalaya government petitioned the Supreme Court to direct the Centre to settle the dispute. However, the petition was dismissed by the Court.

2021: In January 2021, Union Home Minister urged all the north-eastern States to resolve their boundary disputes by August 15, 2022, when the country celebrates 75 years of Independence.

In June 2021, the **two States decided to resume talks at the CM level and adopt a “give-and-take” policy** to settle the disputes once and for all.

Of the 12 disputed sectors, six ‘less complicated’ areas — Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pilingkata and Ratacherra were chosen for resolving in the first phase. Both States formed three regional committees, one each for a district affected by the disputed sectors.

Why have the States been unable to resolve the boundary disputes in decades?

Colonial Problem: The fault lines created by the British in boundary demarcation are still unaddressed. They created boundaries according to their commercial interests. In the process, sensitivities of local communities regarding land were either ignored or suppressed.

Political Milieu: There has been a proliferation of political conversations that target migrants and ‘outsiders’. This shrinks the space and scope for fluid borders and fixes the identities of people as per the region.

Economic relevance: Economic competition for land coupled with a lack of non-farm jobs across the Northeast region, is also enhancing bitterness among states.

Half Hearted attempts by the governments: The sustained tensions at border points is a result of half hearted attempts by the governments. They have deployed paramilitary forces but have not been able to truly develop the region.

What has been agreed in the settlement?

The regional committees acted based on five principles: **(a)** Historical facts of a disputed sector; **(b)** Ethnicity; **(c)** Administrative convenience; **(d)** Willingness of people; **(e)** Contiguity of land preferably with natural boundaries such as rivers, streams and rocks.

On 29th January 2022, the two governments had signed a draft resolution prepared on the basis of the recommendations of these regional panels. This paved the way for the March 29 closure of the six disputed sectors.

According to the partial boundary deal, Assam will get 18.51 sq. km of the 36.79 sq. km disputed area while Meghalaya will get the remaining 18.28 sq. km.

What is the significance of the Assam Meghalaya Agreement?

Future Dispute resolution: It will help in solving the dispute in the other six disputed sectors — Langpih, Borduar, Nongwah, Matamur, Deshdemoreah Block I and Block II, and Khanduli. Further, it could be a guiding light for solving Assam's dispute with other states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh etc.

Reduction in Violence: Certainty over boundaries would reduce border clashes between the masses and save invaluable human lives. For instance, the July 2021 Assam and Mizoram police force clash resulted in the death of six Assamese policemen.

Development of the North East: It will help in better development of the region as peace would bring more projects and investments into the region.

Foreign Policy Objectives: It will help actualise India's Act East policy and also prevent an adversarial China from taking advantage of the fault lines in Northeastern region.

What are the bottlenecks?

Lack of Clarity: There is no clarity yet on the villages or uninhabited stretches that would be divided.

Discontent in masses: Some political parties and community-based groups in Meghalaya are unhappy about acceding any part of the disputed areas to Assam. Similarly there are groups in Assam who want full control over the disputed land.

Fear of Displacement: There is apprehension among the 'non-tribal' people about living in 'tribal' Meghalaya with 'no rights'. They fear they may have to shift their residence in the light of transfer of land.

What lies ahead?

First, the test of both the CMs would be to sell the agreement to their respective domestic constituencies, and ensure that the residents on the border villages are not alienated in the process.

Second, the two States must further leverage their political capital with the Centre and expeditiously solve the issue of the other six disputed areas.

Third, the Survey of India should be provided with all the financial, technical and human resources so as to ensure that delineation happens as per the Agreement.

Conclusion

Sectarian tribalism has been the bane of the North-eastern States, with underdevelopment acting as a catalyst in complicating knotty issues over land and other issues in the region. The Northeastern states must realize that they share a collective destiny. They should be sensitive to and accommodative of each other's interests so that the entire region can prosper. In this regard the Agreement between Assam and Meghalaya is a positive beginning. It should pave the way for peaceful settlement of other such disputes in the region.

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