7 PM COMPILATION

April, 2022

Features of 7 PM compilation

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

Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka – Explained, Pointwise
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Sub topic:- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

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

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

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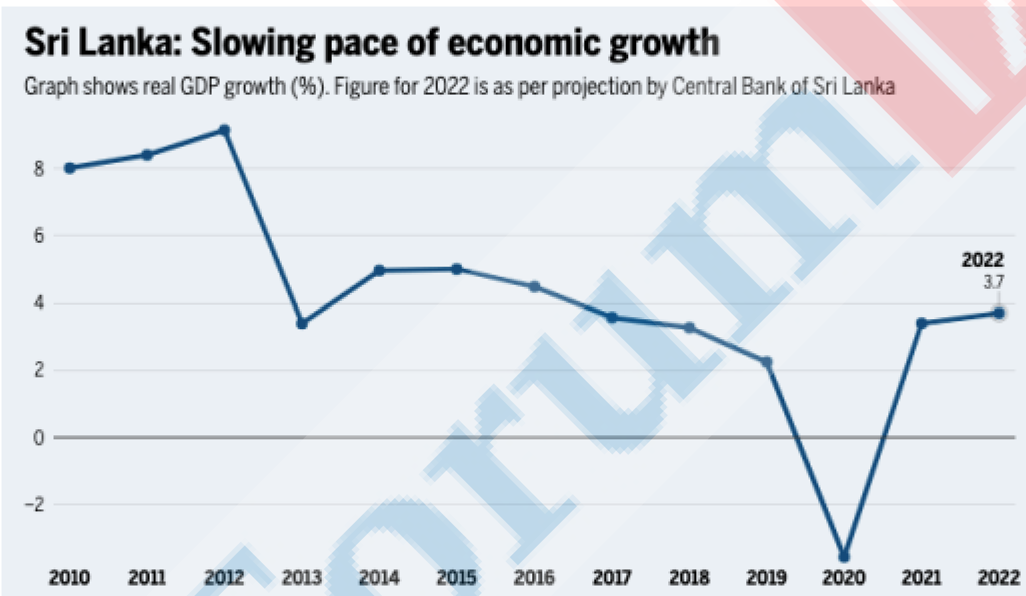
Economic Crisis in Sri Lanka – Explained, Pointwise

Introduction

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

What is the status of the economy of Sri Lanka?

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



Source: The Times of India

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

What are the reasons behind the economic crisis?

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

The Government wanted to become first country to fully adopt organic farming. So the use of chemical fertilizers was banned in April 2021. However, 90% of Sri Lanka's farmers used chemical fertilizers for cultivation. The move led to drastic reduction in food production, resulting in high prices.

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

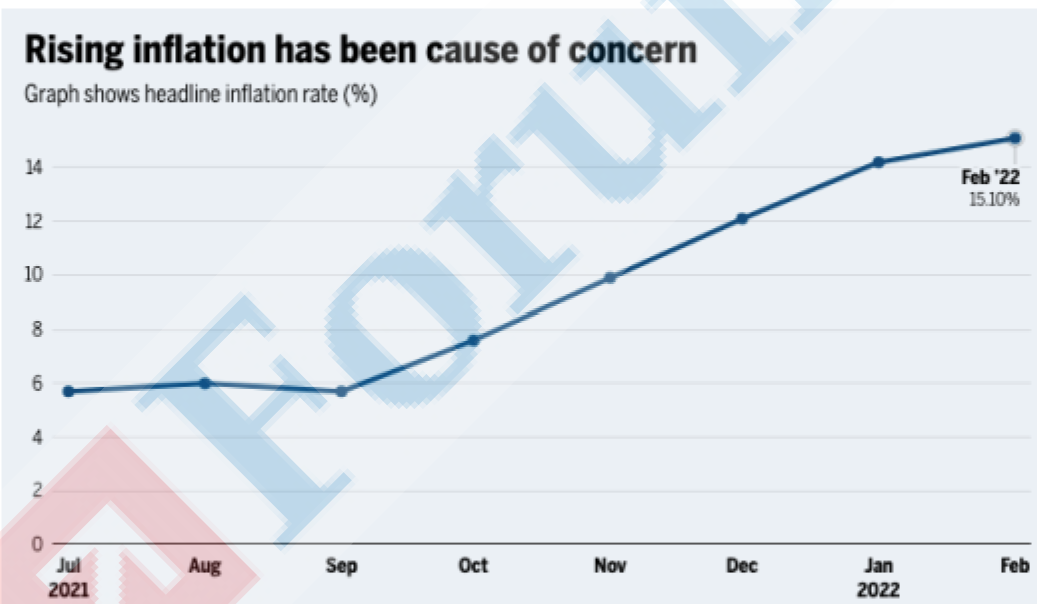
Depleting Forex: The country's foreign exchange reserves have fallen 70% in the past two years, from US$ 8 billion in 2020 to about US$ 2.31 billion. This has made it difficult to pay for essential imports, including food and fuel. A critical shortfall in foreign currency has enhanced hardships for traders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

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

What impact is being created by the crisis?

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

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



Source: The Times of India

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

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

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

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

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

What are the concerns for India?

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

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

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

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

What steps have been taken to combat the economic crisis?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What lies ahead?

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Source: Indian Express, Indian Express, The Times of India, Business Standard

Endangered Languages in India – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

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

What is the current status of endangered languages in India?

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

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

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

What are some of the endangered languages in India?

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

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

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

Why do languages become endangered?

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

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

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

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

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

What is the need to preserve languages?

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

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

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

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

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

What steps have been taken for their preservation?

Domestic

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

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

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

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

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

Global

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

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

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

What more steps can be taken?

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Source: [Mint]

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

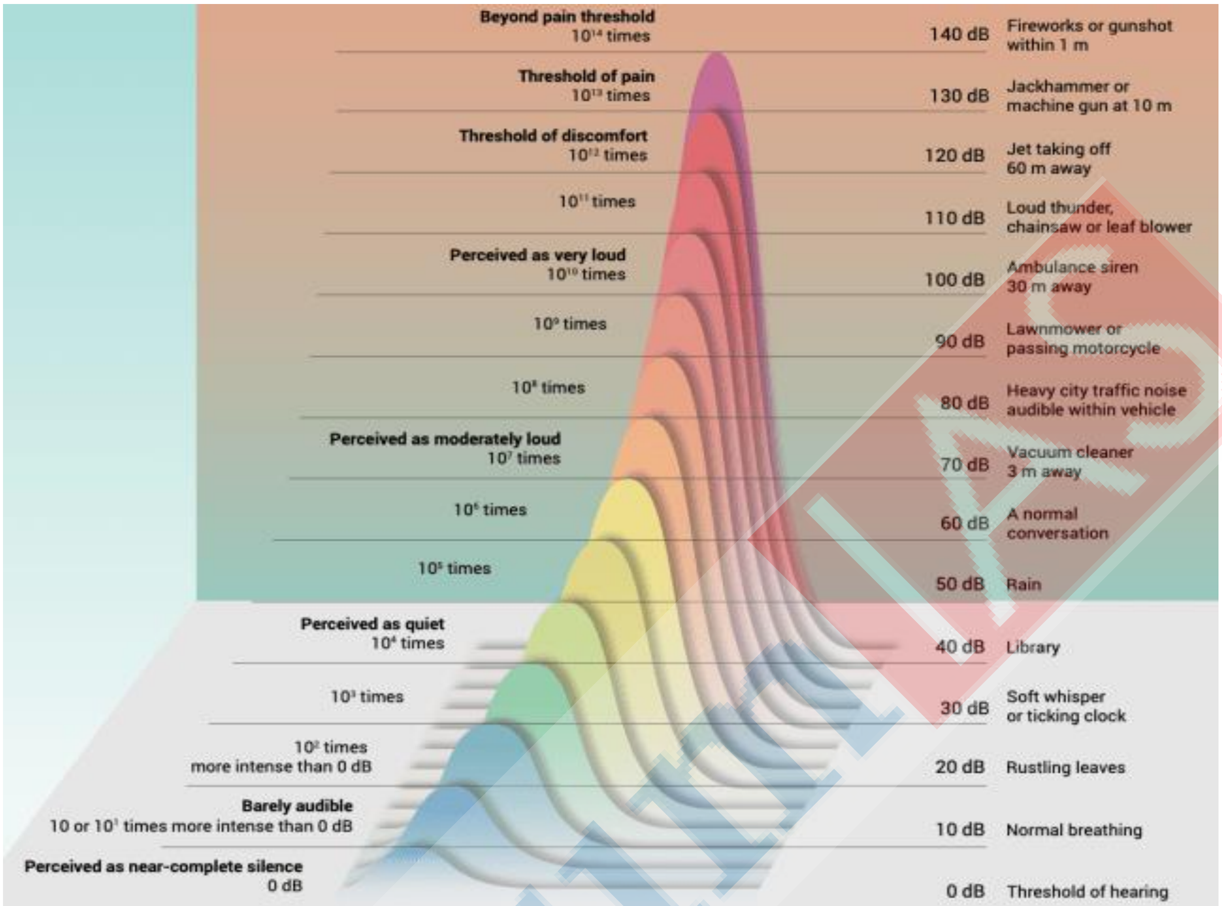
Introduction

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

What is Noise Pollution?

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

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



Source: UNEP Frontiers, 2022

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

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

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

Source: WHO, Vikaspedia

What are the key findings of the UNEP's Frontiers Report on Noise Pollution?
Delhi, Jaipur, Kolkata, Asansol and Moradabad are the five Indian cities mentioned in the UNEP's list of cities with maximum noise pollution.

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

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

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

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

What are the various causes of noise pollution?

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

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

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

Why are the harmful impacts of noise pollution?

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

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

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

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

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

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

What steps have been taken to tackle noise pollution?

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

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

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

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

Source: Indian Journal of Community Medicine

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

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

What are the concerns in tackling noise pollution?

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

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

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

What are the ways to reduce Noise Pollution?

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Source: The Hindu, UNEP

India-Australia Trade Agreement – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

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

What is the current status of India Australia Trade Relations?

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

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

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

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

What is the background of the India Australia Trade Agreement?

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

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

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

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

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

What are the key features of the agreement?

Source: Business Standard

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

Preferential Market Access

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

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

Services Trade

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

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

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

Excluded Tariff Lines

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

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

What is the significance of India Australia Trade Agreement?

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

Source: Economic Times

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

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

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

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

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

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

What lies ahead?

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Source: Mint, PIB, Indian Express, Business Standard, Economic Times

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

Introduction

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

What is NATO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What are the objectives of NATO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

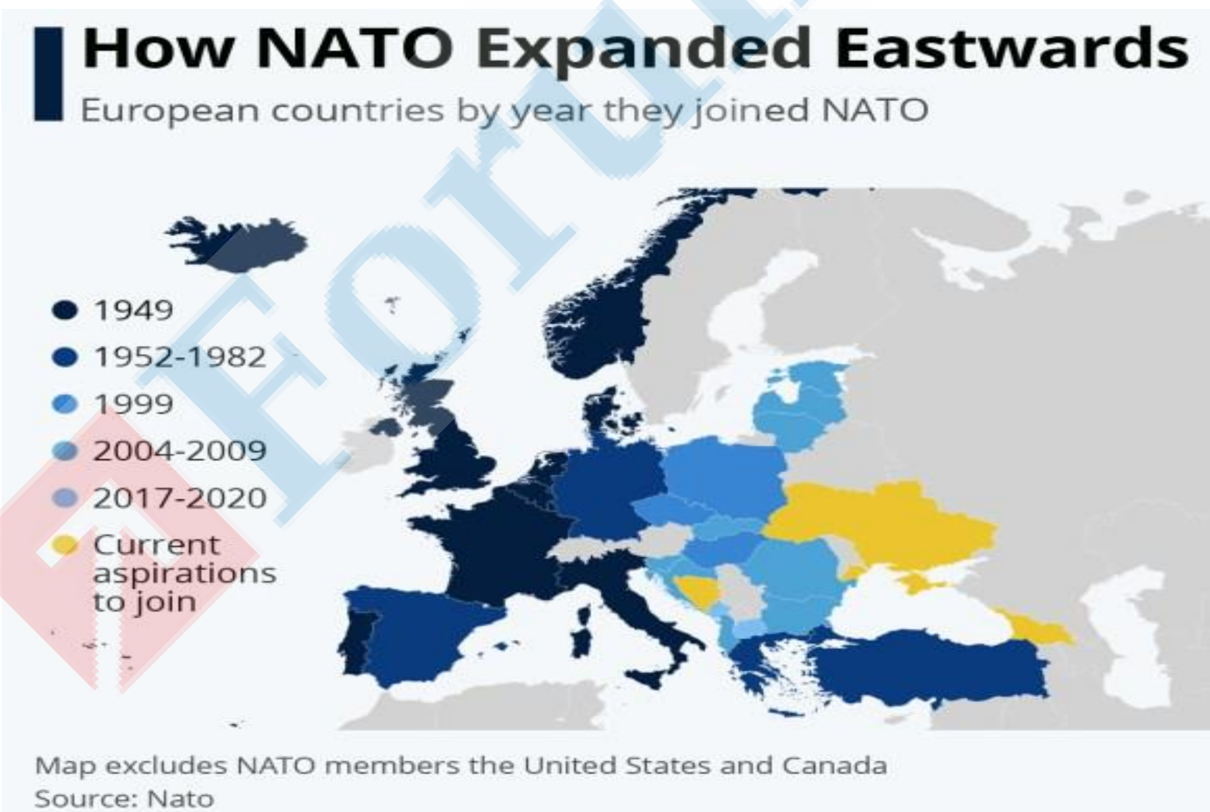
Changing nature of Security Threats: Many regions and countries around the world are witnessing the acquisition of substantial, modern military capabilities with consequences for international stability and Euro-Atlantic security.

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

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

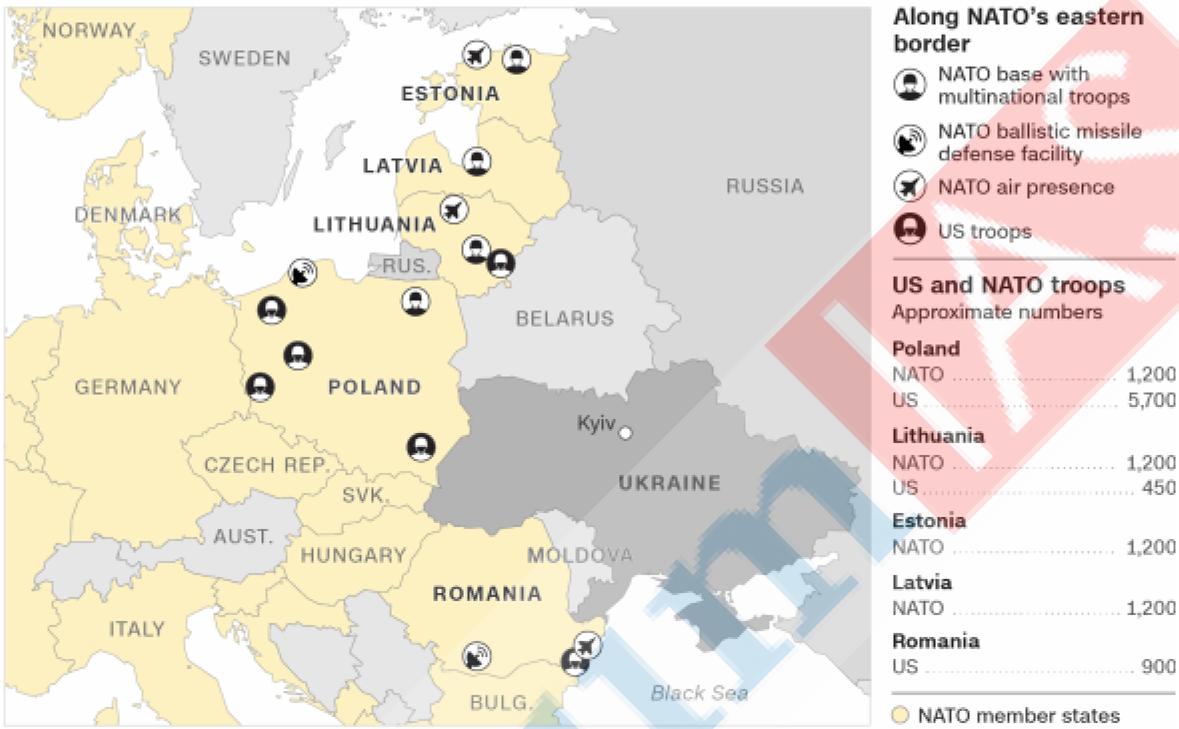
Why do some experts suggest that NATO should be dissolved?

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



Source: The Guardian

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



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

Source: CNN

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

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

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

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

What lies ahead?

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Source: **Indian Express**

[Yojana April Summary] Fintech Revolution – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

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

What is the meaning of Financial technology or Fintech?

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

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

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

What is the status of India's fintech revolution?

Source: Yojana

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: PM highlights importance of fintech, warns against covid

Phases of India's Fintech Revolution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: The new fintech department of RBI has its work cut out

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

(1) Surge in e-commerce and smartphone penetration; **(2) Integrated ecosystem:** All participants such as government agencies, financial and research institutions, and technology experts discussed the ideas and turn the market's latent potential of fintech for business and economic growth; **(3) Indian innovations**: The **Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) through a PIN or OTP** has been recognised globally as an Indian innovation responsible for relatively lowering the incidence of fraud; **(4) Government's philosophy of inclusion and innovation**: The Government policies and regulations in the Fintech sector have followed the philosophy of inclusion and innovation. These include, **(a) Jan-Dhan Yojana**: The world's largest financial inclusion initiative; **(b) e-RUPI**: for cashless payments; **(c) India Stack**: Public digital infrastructure based on open APIs; **(d) FASTag**: Online toll collection; **(e) International Financial Services Centre Authority (IFSCA)**: – In the Union Budget 2021-22 the government has announced its support for the development of a world-class Fintech Hub at the **GIFT – IFSC**; **(f) Multiple initiatives for financial literacy**: Such as the government's **National Centre for Financial Education** and **RBI's Centre for Financial Literacy project; (g) Infinity Forum**: The forum will focus on how technology and innovation can be leveraged by the FinTech industry.

Read more: Union Minister Flags Off NITI Aayog's Fintech Open Summit

What are the challenges faced by the Fintech firms?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Atal Innovation Mission concludes first fintech cohort of 'AIM-iLEAP'

What can be done to facilitate the Fintech revolution further?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: India and UN-Based Better Than Cash Alliance organizes learning on fintech solutions

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

National Medical Register : Advantages and Challenges – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

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

About the three draft guidelines and the National Medical Register

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Structural and practical limitations of Indian medical education system

What is NExT?

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

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

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

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

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

About the present National Medical Register

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

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

Read more: What ails medical education in India

What are the advantages of the National Medical Register?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Salient provisions of National Medical Bill, 2019

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

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

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

Read more: What the plight of students in Ukraine reveals about medical education in India

What are the challenges associated with the draft guidelines?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Medical Education in India and Associated Issues – Explained, pointwise

What should be done?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Landmark decision taken by Government of India in Medical Education

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

Sources: The Indian Express (**Article 1**, **Article 2**)

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

Introduction

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

What are the impacts of climate change on food systems?


● Over **41% insect populations declined by three-quarters in the last 25 years,** due to pesticides and land use change. Many insects consume only one type of plant and cannot survive if these are cleared for industrial farming — while **58% butterfly species** have collapsed on farmlands in Britain. 37% **dragonfly pollinators are endangered.** Interestingly, **humans are dependent on such pollinators to create food** and could only survive for a few months without insects

Research: National Geographic, The Guardian, IUCN

Source: TOI

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

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

Source: TOI

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

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

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

Note*: *Zinc *is important for immune systems — populations deficient in it have higher rates of mortality from infectious diseases, which particularly impact children.*
Iron *is also extremely important — people with fewer levels of iron tend to suffer from anaemia, higher maternal and infant mortality, lower work capacity, reduced IQs and stunting in children*

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

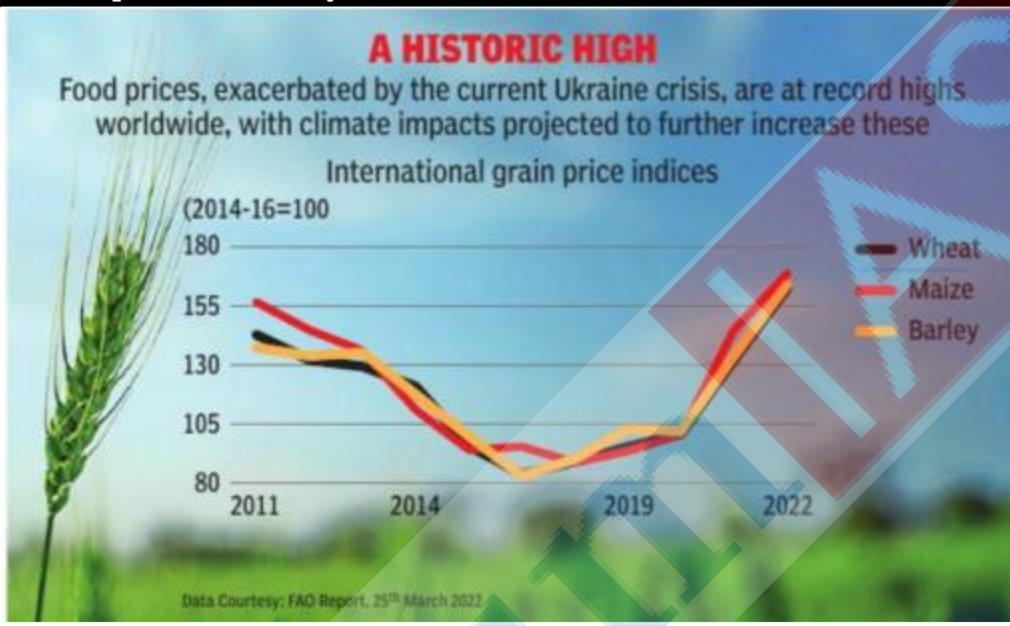
Source: TOI

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

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

Read more: Need to make agri-food systems resilient to address food security: SOFA 2021

What are the Impacts of Food Systems on Environment?



Source: TOI

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

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

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

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

Read more: Food security policy formulation: What can India learn from other countries?

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

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

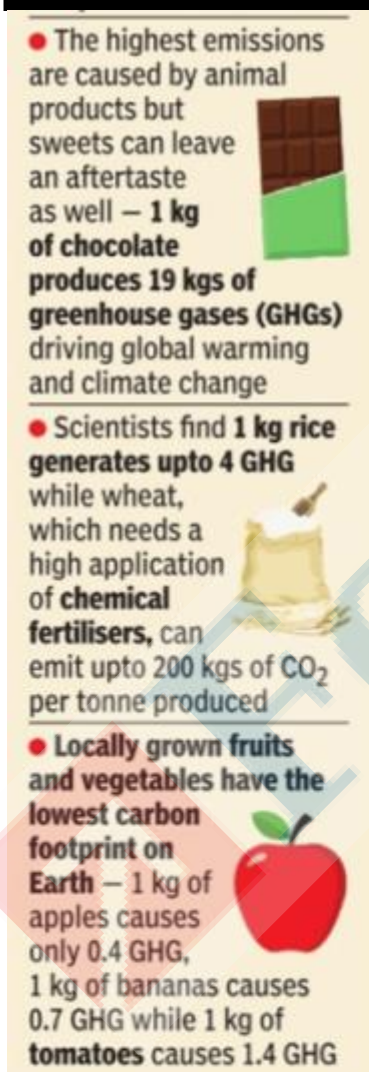
The entire Indo-Gangetic plain from Punjab to Bengal is known as the main rice and wheat belt of the country. Many places within this belt, in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal; are also the areas of high rural poverty.

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

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

Read more: Biofortified food can lead India from food security to nutrition security

What should be done to adjust the food systems?



Source: TOI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Food security in India and its challenges- Explained, pointwise

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

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

Introduction

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

What is the need for Jal Jeevan Mission?

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

Read more: Jal Jeevan Mission: Flowing in the right direction

About the Jal Jeevan Mission

Launched by: Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019.

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

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

Key Features of the mission

Source: JJM

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: NAL SE JAL SCHEME

Jal Jeevan Mission Urban

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

Read more: Jal Jeevan Mission launches innovation challenge for portable water testing devices

What have been the achievements of JJM so far?

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

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

Read more: Puducherry becomes 'Har Ghar Jal' UT under "Jal Jeevan Mission"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Grand ICT Challenge under Jal Jeevan Mission

What are the challenges associated with Jal Jeevan Mission?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Clean drinking water to all: Initiatives and challenges – Explained Pointwise

What should be done to improve the performance of JJM?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

– Hindi should be accepted as an alternative to English and not to local languages. On the other hand, Hindi should be made more flexible by accepting words from other local languages.

– Elementary knowledge of Hindi should be given to students up to Class 9 and pay more attention to Hindi teaching examinations.

– India should republish the Hindi dictionary by revising it.

– According to MHA, currently, 70% of the agenda of the Cabinet is prepared in Hindi.

– Nine tribal communities of the North East have converted their dialects' scripts to Devanagari. Further, 22,000 Hindi teachers have been recruited in the eight states of the Northeast.

Read more: A language ladder for an education roadblock

About the India's Common Language Policy

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

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

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

Read more: "Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India" (SPPEL) to promote all Indian Languages including endangered languages

What are the Constitutional Provisions Related to Hindi?

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: NEP 2020 and language policy

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

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

Read more: "3 Language Policy" is not applicable to the Central govt. offices

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

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

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

Failure of the Three language formula: In the five decades since the promulgation of the 'three-language formula', implementation has largely failed across the country. This is for two reasons; **(a)** Anti-Hindi agitations in various states, such as Tamil Nadu; **(b)** There is no demand for learning a Southern or North-Eastern Language in states that demand Hindi as an official language.

Read more: Endangered Languages in India – Explained, pointwise

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As recommended by a Member of Parliament:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: One year of National Education Policy – Explained, pointwise

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other collaborations:

– The two nations will further increase the "scope and complexity" of their military combat exercises, as well as "deepen cooperation" between their elite Special Forces.

– The dialogue agreed to expand the scope of reciprocal military logistics.

– The US has announced that it did not made a determination to apply CAATSA sanctions on India for the purchase of Russian arms.

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

Read more: Dynamism in India US ties

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Ukraine conflict and its implications for India – Explained, pointwise

What are the challenges in India-US relations?

Economic challenges: **(a)** In 2020, America **withdrew special trade privileges granted to India** under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). In retaliation, India hiked the tariffs on 28 American goods, including walnut, apples, iron and steel products; **(b)** The US has complained about **India's complex customs clearance procedures** and associated delays increased costs and uncertainty; **(c)** The US feels that **India is a high tariff country**. The US wants the tariffs reduced and a more predictable regime to conduct business.

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

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

Read more: The sanctions clouds over India US Ties

What should be done to improve India-US relations?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: India-US ties: The scope for literal common space

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

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

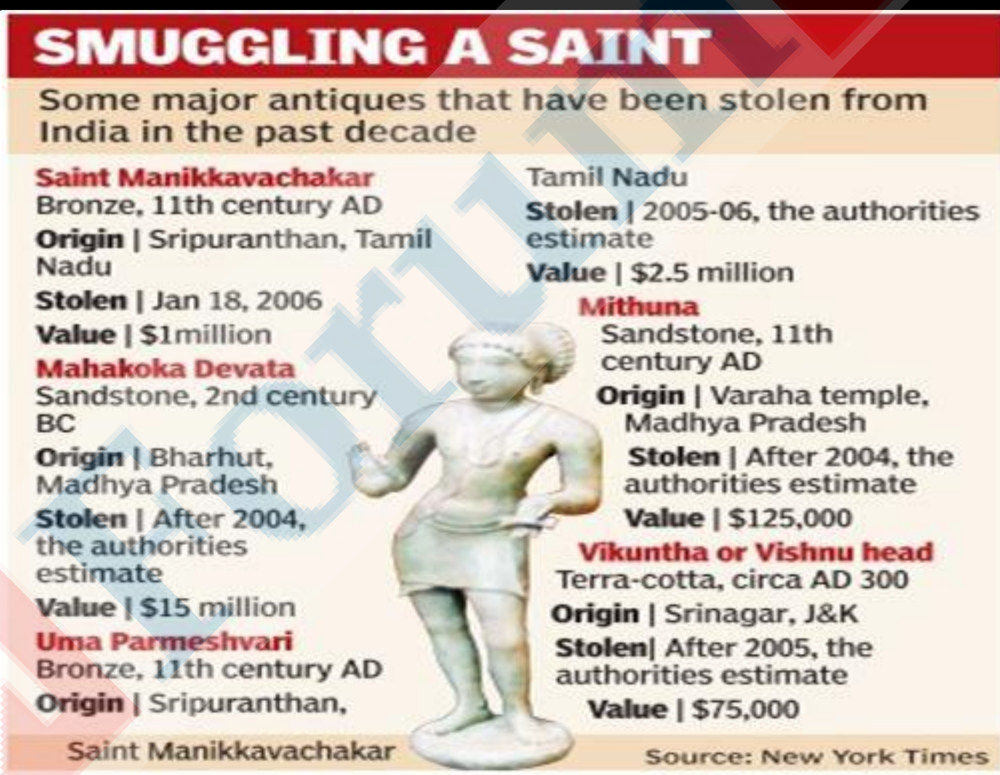
Source: The Times of India, The Times of India, Business Standard

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

Introduction

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

About India's the status of Stolen idols and artefacts



Source: Indiapedia

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

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

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

Read more: Karnataka has most number of stolen artefacts

About Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

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

Functions of ASI

– Regulates all archaeological activities in the country as per the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.

– Regulates Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.

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

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

Read more: Monuments in India: issues and Challenges

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Schemes administered by the Ministry of Culture to promote and disseminate the art & Culture

International collaborations

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

Private initiatives

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

Read more: A catalogue of all that's valuable

What are the challenges in controlling idols and artefacts stealing?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Ministry of Culture is reprinting "Mongolian Kanjur" manuscripts

What should be done?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Interpol's "ID-Art App" to help protect cultural property

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

Source: Indian Express

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

Introduction

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

About the present ropeway accident

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

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

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

What are ropeways and how are they regulated?

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

The regulatory authority of ropeways in India

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Ministry of Tourism has formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in India

What are the advantages of creating ropeway infrastructure in India?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other advantages

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

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

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

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

Read more: PM Gati Shakti – National Infrastructure Master Plan – Explained, pointwise

What are the challenges associated with ropeways?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Read more: Urban Mobility in India- Challenges and Way Forward

What should be done?

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

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

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

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

Read more: [Yojana April Summary] Fintech Revolution – Explained, pointwise

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

Source: Mint, PIB

[Kurukshetra April Summary] Women Entrepreneurs – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Empowerment of Women is essential for sustainable development and economic growth of the country. Women Entrepreneurs have emerged as an important means to empower womenfolk to make decisions regarding their domestic, social, political and economic life. To increase women's participation, the Government has come up with various schemes and initiatives. Capacity building programs, easy access to finance and mentorship programs have been at the core of government initiatives. However, the need to scale these initiatives is immense considering the targets of economic development; and more importantly, for creating a conducive ecosystem for women entrepreneurship.

About the status of Women Entrepreneurs in India

The **Sixth Economic Census** is the most cited data in the literature on Women Entrepreneurship in India. It reveals that out of the 58.5 million businesses, only 8.05 million were owned by women. Thus, of the total entrepreneurs in India, only 13.7% are women.

According to the **Female Entrepreneurship Index**, out of 77 countries covered, India ranks 70. And as per the August 2019 report of the International Finance Corporation, India ranks third among countries reporting gender gaps in business.

As per the data available with Start-up India, the number of women entrepreneurs in the start-up ecosystem has increased to 14%, up from 10% and 11% in the last two years.

Last year, India added more than 40 unicorns to the list, and many of them are led by women.

Read more: KVIC Rolls Out Unique Business Model to Handhold 70 Women Agarbatti Artisans in Assam

Why does India need Women Entrepreneurs?

Basic building block: Women Entrepreneurship is central to any country's inclusive and sustainable economic development. They are recognised as the new engines of growth. Women's financial independence leads to their partaking in decisions right from their personal lives to their homes and society. Therefore, women's economic freedom is one of the basic building blocks for aspirational society.

Bridge the disparity: According to the World Economic Forum report in 2019, for every dollar, a man gets paid, a woman on average is paid only 54 cents. The old perceptions of family responsibility on women pose an overwhelming challenge. According to the World Bank's **Women, Business and the Law 2022** report, "nearly 2.4 billion women of working age worldwide still are not afforded equal economic opportunities. The most persistent gaps remain in the areas of Pay and Parenthood, demonstrating that many economies have yet to remove restrictions or introduce the good-practice legal rights and benefits identified."

To reach the country's economic ambitions: It is predicted that Women-owned enterprises can generate over 50-60 million jobs by 2030. As the country progresses economically and targets a US$ 5 trillion economy by 2024-25, the need to push Women Entrepreneurs in the country and bridging the rural-urban divide through these enterprises becomes necessary.

Read more: Win for daughters: But more needed to ensure women's property rights

What steps have been taken by Government to support Women Entrepreneurs?

In India, gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and grants equality and empowers the State to adopt measures in favour of women. The Government policies have had the empowerment of women at the core since its fifth five-year plan 1974-79, considering the role women entrepreneurs can play in the development of the economy of the country. Women Entrepreneurship in India is receiving a three-tier boost today. These are,

Self Help Groups

In this, rural women are engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship programmes created with the intention that the joint efforts can be much more successful in overcoming various obstacles faced by the individuals. The members typically use savings, credit, or social involvement to support their entrepreneurial ventures. So far, micro-enterprise has proven to be the best tool for rural women.

Read more: [Yojana September Summary] SHG-led Women Empowerment – Explained, pointwise

Women-Led Enterprises

Source: Kurukshetra

The Government of India has initiated various flagship programmes to facilitate women entrepreneurs, such as

Stand-up India: According to the available data, 81% of beneficiaries of this scheme are women entrepreneurs.

Mahila e-Haat: It is an online marketing platform to support women entrepreneurs. The platform offers an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to leverage technology for showcasing products manufactured by them.

Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana

Read more: UN India business forum, NITI Aayog form consortium to help women entrepreneurs

Women-Led Start-ups

The Government, policymakers, investors, corporates, and other civil society organisations have developed various ways to support women-led start-ups. For instance,

Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) of NITI Aayog.

Mission Youth: It is a pioneering initiative of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. Its aim is to provide all-around facilitation for the youth under various schemes. Under this initiative, "*Tejaswani*" has been launched explicitly for women.

WE Hub: It is an initiative of the Telangana Government. It is India's first State-led Incubator to promote and foster women's entrepreneurship. They facilitate the access to technical, financial, governmental, and policy support required to start up, scale-up, sustain and accelerate the women-led start-ups.

Women Start-up Programme: Indian Institute of Management Bangalore's Start-up and Innovation Hub runs this programme. The programme aims to support ambitious and innovative women entrepreneurs by transforming their idea into business ventures and enhancing their entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

Capacity-building programmes: In fields such as marketing, operations management, quality controls, and financial management, etc.

Read more: Kerala CM launches capacity development programme for women entrepreneurs

What are the challenges in promoting Women Entrepreneurs?

Societal pressures: Entrepreneurship comes with its own set of challenges for both genders. However, the challenges for women are more significant. They are confronted with societal pressures in most regions in India.

Create rural-urban divide: Women Entrepreneurs are generally concentrated in the urban areas. This significantly impacts the rural population where the patriarchal affects are more stark.

Limited access to finance: This is one of the main challenges faced by Women Entrepreneurs. The lack of access to formal financing institutions, coupled with a lack of collateral for loans, often keeps women away from entrepreneurship opportunities.

Lack of technological exposure: This creates barriers to the success of women as entrepreneurs in rural areas specifically. UNIDO-led study on barriers to women's entrepreneurship found that women were influenced more by traditional and internal factors than by legal or regulatory obstacles when starting their business.

Disparity in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) sector: Women make up only 28% of the STEM workforce, and men vastly outnumber women majoring in most STEM fields in college. This creates a disparity in STEM sectors, as these sectors will throw up more jobs than expected in the future.

What should be done to promote Women Entrepreneurs?

Improve the quantity and quality of the start-ups and enterprises established by the women. This can be done by increasing their access to capital. Support in funding would make it easier for women to scale up their endeavours.

Exclusive support: The government should facilitate support during pregnancy and other benefits of childcare. This can create a supportive work environment for them to choose entrepreneurship as a career choice.

Focus on gender-neutrality: A report published by McKinsey Global Institute states that US$ 12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality.

The report identifies six types of intervention to bridge the gender gap: **(1)** Financial incentives and support; **(2)** Technology and infrastructure; **(3)** Creating economic opportunity; **(4)** Capability building; **(5)** Advocacy and shaping attitudes; and **(6)** Laws, policies, and regulations.

Read more: **Involving women in the economy is not a social cause, rather it is a source of efficiency gains and economic growth**

There is a need for emphasised and positive policies in favour of women for building strong economics of the country, through various initiatives and scaling up of the initiatives that already exist in the country.

Sovereign debt crisis: Impacts and measures – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Sri Lankan economy is in big crisis with a credit crunch and a slump in the GDP. The foreign reserves have reduced from US$ 7.5 billion in 2019 to US$ 1.6 billion in 2021. There are pending debt repayments of more than US$ 7 billion. Due to Sri Lanka's sovereign debt crisis, the Sri Lankan government has recently decided to default on all its foreign debt worth US$ 51 billion as it awaits financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government took this decision to preserve its dwindling foreign reserves to pay for the import of essential items. Apart from that, Rating agencies such as Fitch, and Standard & Poor's have downgraded Sri Lanka's sovereign debt.

What is the current economic situation in Sri Lanka?

a) The poor state of the tourism industry, **b) Shortage of forex reserves**: Forex reserves have dropped from over US$ 7.5 billion in 2019 to around US$ 2 billion. **c) Depreciation of currency**: The printing of SLRs. 800 billion by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka has led to a sharp spike in inflation. This in turn has devalued the currency, made imports costlier, added to the debt, and put the forex reserves under more pressure, **d)Rise in price of food items**: Sri Lanka depends heavily on imports to meet even its basic food supplies The government's ban on the use of chemical fertilizers in farming has further aggravated the crisis by dampening agricultural production.

Due to these reasons, Sri Lanka's public debt-to-GDP ratio was at 109.7% in 2020, and its gross financing needs to remain high at 18% of GDP, higher than most of its emerging economy peers.

Must read: **Sri Lanka's economic crisis: Challenges for India – Explained, pointwise**

What is a Sovereign debt crisis?

Sovereign debt refers to the debt issued or accumulated by any government. Governments take on sovereign debt by issuing bonds or other debt securities or by taking out loans from other countries and multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund.

Governments borrow money to finance the various expenses that they cannot meet through their regular tax revenues. They usually need to pay interest on such debt along with the principal amount over time.

It is also known as **government debt, public debt, and national debt**.

Read more: **Understanding the sovereign debt crisis in Sri Lanka**

What are some unique features of Sovereign Debt?

Unlike private borrowers,

1) Governments can raise tax revenue, and also issue their own currency, **2)** Governments can also be overthrown by regimes. The new regime might refuse to honor their debt obligations or incur economic sanctions that may cause their debt to lose value, **3)** Defaulting sovereign borrowers are rarely subject to legal enforcement, and creditors often find it difficult to target the defaulted sovereign's assets.

Read more: **Explained: What are sovereign bonds, and what are their risks and rewards?**

What is the status of global sovereign debt at present?

According to the asset management firm Janus Henderson, Global government debt is set to rise 9.5% in 2022 to a record US$ 71.6 trillion. This will be driven by countries such as the United States, Japan and China.

Globally governments have ramped up borrowing since the Covid-19 pandemic, as they tried to shield their economies from the fallout. That took global government debt to a record US$ 65.4 trillion in 2021, compared to US$ 52.2 trillion in January 2020.

According to Janus Henderson, **government debt has tripled** in the past two decades but a mitigating factor was low debt servicing costs.

Read more: Deepening debt crisis in SL strokes crisis over Chinese lending

About few Sovereign Debt Crisis

Sovereign Debt Crisis in the USA (2008)

Reason: Trouble in the financial market led to issues in the housing sector that aggravated into financial market decline.

Lehman Brothers were declared bankrupt leading to a full-scale crisis in the financial sector.

Measures: **a)** Dodd-Frank Act amended many existing legislations and created many new stand-alone provisions. **b)** The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act provided US$ 700 billion in bailout relief. **c)** Many new committees and the Federal Reserve were tasked with the responsibilities of greater financial market oversight.

Measures: Countries has been bailed out by the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with conditions to cut budgetary spending.

Sovereign Debt Crisis in the Eurozone (2011)

Reason: Accumulation of unsustainable levels of government debt by various countries of the Eurozone such as Spain, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal(popularly known as the PIGS crisis).

Greece had the biggest budget deficit of 12.7% in 2009 and one of the highest levels of public debt (160% public debt to GDP ratio in 2012) in the Euro-zone.

Read more: India's Sovereign Ratings don't reflect its fundamentals

About the sovereign debt in India

Source: World Bank

According to the data from RBI, India's sovereign debt (combined liabilities of the Central and State governments) to gross domestic product (GDP), at constant prices, increased to a record high of 100.86% in 2020 as against 76.86% in 2014.

With this amount, India has become the most indebted nation after Brazil and Argentina among the emerging market economies. In South Asia also, India is the most indebted after Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Read more: India's debt-to-GDP ratio at a 14-year high

What are the steps taken by the Indian government to reduce public debt?

Role of RBI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is responsible for managing India's public debt, especially debt denominated in the domestic currency. The debt of the state governments, on the other hand, is managed by the RBI under bilateral agreements.

March 1997 supplemental agreement between the RBI and the government: The supplemental agreement discontinued the issuance of ad-hoc treasury bills by the government to the RBI to finance the fiscal deficit.

The FRBM Act, 2003 **prohibits the RBI** from participating in the primary auctions for government loans. Together, this prevents the fiscal deficit from monetisation.

Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003: The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM Act) was enacted in 2003 to introduce transparency in India's fiscal management systems by reducing the fiscal deficit.

The act mandated the reduction of the fiscal deficit to 3% of GDP, but it has been subsequently amended, and the present target is 3.1% by March 2023.

Note:

Escape clause of FRBM Act: *Under this clause, the Centre can deviate from the fiscal consolidation road map. The option allows the government to widen the deficit by 0.5 percentage points in times of exigencies such as a war or calamities of national proportion.*

Read more: The creeping concerns over India's debt

What are the impacts of defaulting on sovereign debt by the state?

International lenders may be reluctant to lend any more money to the government unless such lending is part of a restructuring agreement.

Impact on ratings: This will make it difficult for the state to access new funds from the international bond market. For instance, the U.S. lost its traditional top spot in private agencies' sovereign credit ratings in 2011 when Standard and Poor's downgraded its credit from AAA to AA+.

Withdrawal of investments: While defaulting the state becomes less attractive to investors, especially to foreign portfolio investors fearing the crash of global markets.

Other impacts: Increased unemployment, reduce forex reserves, reduction in remittances, and reduce government spending on socio-economic programmes such as poverty reduction, health, etc.

Read more: Time ripe for sovereign external borrowing

What are the measures to prevent a Sovereign Debt Crisis?

Managing the debt: The governments have to maintain debt sustainability and improve measures essential for the assessment of debt sustainability. For instance developing a medium-term debt management strategy (MTDS).

Public debt management assistance: Developed countries can provide dedicated public debt management assistance to developing/Least developed countries through various international institutions such as IMF, WB, etc.

Responsible sovereign borrowing: many governments simply choose to borrow fresh debt to repay existing debt. Historically, governments have tended to borrow more money than they could actually repay in order to fund populist spending.

Hence, the governments have to bear the responsibility and must follow global best practices such as maintaining sub 3% fiscal deficit.

Debt transparency: Public debts pose a challenge to the global effort to end extreme poverty and achieve other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. So, debt transparency is critical.

Creditors, donors, analysts, and rating agencies need to assess sovereign creditworthiness and appropriately price debt instruments.

What are the measures to overcome the Sovereign Debt Crisis?

Austerity measures: It refers to economic policies implemented by governments to reduce government spending in order to reduce public debt and shrink the budget deficit. Some of such measures include increasing taxes, reducing spending on government programs, reducing the salaries and wages of government employees, etc.

Sovereign debt restructuring: The debt restructurings come in two ways. **a) decisive restructurings** This focus on bringing the debt crisis to an end and interim restructurings that fall short of placing debt on a sustainable path, so that the country ends up relapsing within two yearswas associated with more prolonged periods of market exclusion and higher borrowing costs.

Read more: India's structural opportunity in a new age of financial repression

The governments should make the public debt sustainable by carefully crafting their strategy on the outlines of growth with financial stability in mind.

Sources: The Business Standard, The Hindu Business Line, World Bank, BIS, The Hindu

The Right to Repair – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Apple recently announced that consumers will have the right to purchase spare components of their products. This has been done after an order of the Federal Trade Commission of the United States. The order directs manufacturers to **remedy unfair anti-competitive practices** and asks them to make sure that consumers can make repairs, either themselves or by a third-party agency. The move is a positive step to strengthen the right to repair which would allow individuals to optimally utilize the purchased goods. It would enable countries like India to enact concrete provisions on the right to repair by taking inspiration from their western counterparts including the U.S and U.K.

What is the Right to Repair and its background?

It is a right to give users and third-party companies the required tools, parts and manuals related to a product. This would enable them to **repair a product on their own** instead of depending on the manufacturers. The right to repair movement traces its roots back to the very dawn of the computer era in the 1950s.

The rationale behind the movement is that the **individual who purchases a product must own it completely.** This implies that apart from being able to use the product, consumers must be able to repair and modify the product the way they want to.

However in spite of the movement, repairing is becoming unreasonably expensive or pretty much impossible because of the technology becoming obsolete. Further, companies avoid the publication of manuals that can help users make repairs easily, manufacturers have proprietary control over spare parts and most firms refuse to make their products compatible with those of other firms.

Why are the reasons to provide Right to Repair?

Pricing: The absence of repair manuals means that manufacturers hold near-monopoly over repair workshops that charge consumers exorbitant prices.

Tackle planned obsolescence: Planned obsolescence is a policy of producing consumer goods that become obsolete after a certain period of time. Consequently, consumers must buy the new product once the existing product becomes unusable. It is achieved by frequent changes in design, termination of the supply of spare parts, and the use of non-durable materials.

In such a scenario, buying a replacement is often cheaper and easier than repairing them. However, with the right to repair, companies would be induced to make durable and long-lasting devices.

Right to Choose: Monopoly on repair processes infringes the customers' 'right to choose' recognised by the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Boosting Local Economy: Right to repair allows opening up of small repair shops in the local area that adds to the revenue of the region and also creates sufficient employment.

Environment protection: It will prevent faster dumping of electronic devices into the landfill and encourage judicious use of resources for environment protection. Further, manufacturing an electronic device is a highly polluting process. It makes use of polluting sources of energy, such as fossil fuel, which has an adverse impact on the environment. Improving longevity of electronic devices will reduce the impact on environment.

Source: iFixtit. iFixit is a global community of people helping each other repair things. It provides thousands of repair manuals for a wide range of devices, from cellphones to appliances. All the content is provided by volunteer users.

Which is the global status of Right to Repair?

Some jurisdictions offer limited scope for exercising the right to repair:

Australia: Under the Australian Consumer Law, consumers have a right to request that certain goods be repaired if they break too easily or do not work properly. Manufacturers must provide spare parts and repair facilities for a 'reasonable' time after an item is purchased. **Repair cafés** are a remarkable feature of the Australian system. These are free meeting places where volunteer fixers gather to share their repairing skills with people who bring in items such as bikes, appliances etc. goods that need mending.

U.S: The Massachusetts Motor Vehicle Owners' Right to Repair Act, 2012 requires automobile manufacturers to provide spare parts and diagnostics to buyers and even independent third-party mechanics. On July 09 2021, the US President signed an executive order. It has lifted restrictions imposed by manufacturers that limit consumers' ability to repair their gadgets on their own terms.

U.K: It introduced the path-breaking 'right to repair' in 2021 that makes it legally binding on manufacturers to provide spare parts.

European Union: Its right to repair laws require manufacturers to ensure that electronic goods can be repaired for up to a decade.

What are the challenges in granting the Right to Repair?

Security and Privacy: Tech giants contend that security and privacy concerns may crop up if products based on a technology patented by them are opened up by third parties.

Lobbying by Big Companies: Large tech companies, including Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Tesla, have been lobbying against the right to repair. They are constantly claiming that they are working towards greater durability themselves.

For instance; In 2021, Apple took more steps towards reducing its contribution to e-waste. It has now expanded its free, independent repair provider program in 200 countries.

Microsoft has pointed out how it improved the battery and hard drive of its third-generation Surface Laptop after it was criticized for making it next to impossible to replace the battery in older models.

Other mechanisms to restrict independent repairing: Big companies often deploy mechanisms that practically forbid other enterprises to repair their products. For instance, Digital warranty cards ensure that by getting a product from a "non-recognised" outfit, a customer loses the right to claim a warranty.

What lies ahead?

First, India should enact a dedicated repair law in order to augment consumer welfare. In ***Shamsher Kataria v Honda Siel Cars India Ltd (2017)***, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) ruled that restricting the access of spare parts to independent automobile repair units by way of an end-user license agreement was anti-competitive. The CCI observed that the practice was detrimental to consumer welfare.

Second, countries **must learn from good legislations and practices** from other countries like the prevalence of Repair cafes in Australia.

Third, countries must realize that a well-drafted legislation will not only uphold the right to repair but may aid in **striking a much-needed balance** between intellectual property and competitive laws in the country. Further, it will strengthen the **circular economy** by improving the life span, maintenance, re-use, upgrade, recyclability and waste handling of appliances.

Conclusion

Countries around the world have been attempting to pass effective 'right to repair' laws. But the movement has faced tremendous resistance from tech giants such as Apple and Microsoft over the years. Nonetheless, the recent move by Apple has given a positive thrust to the right to repair movement and is expected to expedite the formulation of repair laws in other countries.

Source: Indian Express, India Express, Business Standard

Global Centre for Traditional Medicine – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Indian Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) in Jamnagar on April 19, 2022. Traditional medicines products abound globally and the Centre will go a long way in enhancing wellness in society. It aims to harness the potential of traditional medicine from across the world through modern science and technology. It will enable the utilization of this potential to improve the health of people and the planet. It is a welcome step but much more needs to be done in order to truly unleash the potential of the traditional medicine system.

What is traditional medicine?

The WHO describes traditional medicine as the sum total of the 'knowledge, skills and practices that indigenous and different cultures have used over time to maintain health and diagnose and treat physical and mental illness'. Its reach encompasses ancient practices such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine and herbal mixtures among others.

What are the traditional medicine systems in India?

These include practices and therapies that have been part of Indian tradition historically such as yoga, Ayurveda, Siddha. It also includes other systems that became part of Indian tradition over the years such as homeopathy.

Ayurveda and yoga are practised widely across the country; the Siddha system is followed predominantly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala; the Sowa-Rigpa system is practised mainly in Leh-Ladakh and Himalayan regions such as Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, Lahaul & Spiti.

What is the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM)?

The Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO GCTM) has been set up by the Ministry of Ayush (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) and the WHO.

On November 3, 2020, the WHO director general announced the establishment of the WHO GCTM in India. The Union Cabinet in March this year approved its establishment in Jamnagar with the signing of a host country agreement between the Government of India and the WHO.

India has committed an estimated $250 million to support the GCTM's establishment, infrastructure and operations.

What would be the role of the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine?

First, It will aim to focus on **evidence-based research, innovation, and data analysis** to optimize the contribution of traditional medicine to global health.

Second, Its main focus will be to develop norms, standards and guidelines in technical areas relating to traditional medicine. This will help countries **create a comprehensive, safe, and high-quality health system**.

Third, the GCTM will support efforts to implement the WHO's Traditional Medicine Strategy (2014-23). The strategy aims to support nations in developing policies & action plans to strengthen the role of traditional medicine in pursuing **the goal of universal health coverage**.

Why should more research be undertaken in traditional medicine?

Huge Coverage: The WHO says 170 of its 194 WHO Member States have reported the use of traditional medicine. These member states have asked for its support in creating a body of "reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine practices and products".

Biodiversity Conservation: The WHO has stressed the need to conserve biodiversity and sustainability as about 40% of approved pharmaceutical products today are derived from natural substances. For example, the discovery of aspirin drew on traditional medicine formulations using the bark of the willow tree, the contraceptive pill was developed from the roots of wild yam plants and child cancer treatments have been based on the rosy periwinkle.

Modernisation in studying Traditional Medicine: WHO has acknowledged the growing modernisation of the ways to study traditional medicine. Artificial intelligence is now used to map evidence and trends in traditional medicine.

Similarly, Functional magnetic resonance imaging is used to study brain activity and the relaxation response. This is also part of some traditional medicine therapies such as meditation and yoga which are increasingly drawn on for mental health and well-being in stressful times.

Other Benefits: **(a)** It is generally cheap and affordable. AYUSH medicines have lesser side effects than modern medicine.; **(b)** It has proven to be effective in lifestyle diseases like diabetes and hypertension; **(c)** It is used to provide healthcare in rural hinterlands where there is a shortage of allopathic doctors; **(d)** Many AYUSH medicines like **AYUSH 64, Kabasura Kudineer etc**. were used in tackling the **Covid 19 pandemic**.

What steps have been taken by India to promote traditional medicine?

AYUSH Ministry: A dedicated Ministry was created for traditional medicines named AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy). In 2015, the Ministry of Ayush had also included Sowa Rigpa into the AYUSH system.

Statutory Regulatory Bodies: The Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) and the Central Council of Homeopathy (CCH) are two statutory regulatory bodies. They are responsible for: **(a)** Laying down minimum standards of education; **(b)** Recommending recognition of medical qualifications; **(c)** Registering the practitioners and laying down ethical codes.

Collaborative Efforts: In 2016, the Ministry of AYUSH signed a project collaboration agreement (PCA) with the WHO in the area of traditional medicine. At least 32 MoUs for undertaking collaborative research and development of traditional medicine have been signed with institutes, universities and organisations of various countries. This includes the US, Germany, UK, Canada, Malaysia, Brazil, Australia, Austria, Tajikistan etc.

Technological Interventions: **Ayush Clinical Case Repository (ACCR**) aims at aggregating information about clinical outcomes achieved by Ayush practitioners on a large scale.

The **Ayush *Sanjivani* app** intends to generate a significant study and data regarding the efficacy of selected Ayush interventions. The data analyzed will be helpful for the further development of Ayush Systems.

What are the challenges surrounding traditional medicine?

Tussle with Allopathic care: Many allopathic doctors don't believe in the traditional system. They question the credibility of AYUSH practitioners and are against their inclusion into the modern health care system. For instance, the Indian Medical Association objected to a recent gazette notification by the Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM). The notification allowed postgraduate Ayurvedic doctors to perform 58 basic surgeries.

Lacks in Validation: Scientific validation of AYUSH medicines has not progressed despite dedicated government expenditure. There are very few AYUSH treatments that have been successfully validated by well-designed randomised controlled trials (RCTs).

Poor Quality of Practitioners: The practitioners lack quality as Ayurvedic graduation and post graduation courses are often substandard and of poor quality.

Most AYUSH institutions would have to shut down if they were subjected to the same stringent norms that MBBS medical colleges are subjected to.

Further, due to poor economic opportunities, the AYUSH system fails to attract the country's best talent.

Overuse of AYUSH medicine: They are sold as over the counter products and nutraceuticals to avoid regulation. Further, Ayurvedic stores do not even have a legal requirement of a pharmacist to dispense the medications unlike pharmacies selling modern medicine. This leads to greater consumption and enhanced self-medication.

What should be done?

First, the AYUSH medicines should be **put through rigorous trials** in order to be accepted as legitimate medications in the present times.

Second, the governments must **stop treating AYUSH** education and practice with an **excessively liberal mindset.** They should subject them to the same stringent norms and requirements expected from practitioners of modern medicine.

Third, the government should also focus on Capacity-building of licensed AYUSH practitioners through **bridge training** to meet India's primary care needs.

Fourth, **Cross-pathy** between the traditional and modern systems should be allowed to fill the lacunae in respective systems. However, this must be done after due deliberation with experts from the respective systems.

Conclusion

India has been a proven pioneer in the field of traditional medicine since time immemorial. The establishment of the GCTM with India's support is an effort to bring synergy and cooperation in the domain of traditional medicine that would benefit all the member states. The GCTM will serve as a hub for other countries, and build standards on traditional medicine practices and products.

Source: Indian Express, Mint

Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022: Provisions, Benefits and Concerns – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Union Ministry of Law and Justice recently notified the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022. It seeks to amend the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 passed by Parliament. According to the new Act, the three MCDs—East Delhi Municipal Corporation, South Delhi Municipal Corporation and North Delhi Municipal Corporation—will be merged into one and called the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The Union Government believes that it would ensure a robust mechanism for synergised and strategic planning and optimal utilization of resources. However the Delhi Government views it as a move to diminish the power of the elected government and undermine the spirit of federalism.

What is the Background?

The Delhi Municipal Corporation was split into three, i.e., East, South and North, in 2011 after deliberation and discussion at various levels. The move was aimed to decentralize the large local body.

The split-up was first proposed in the **Balakrishnan Committee Report (1987)**. The recommendation was reiterated by the **Virendra Prakash Committee Report (2001)**. Another committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Ashok Pradhan to study the issue. The proposal finally took shape in 2011 and the law to trifurcate was enacted. This 2011 law amended the original Delhi Municipal Corporation Act of 1957.

It provided for transfer of some powers from the Union Government to the Government of the NCT Delhi. This included overseeing the functioning of the new municipal bodies as well as approving rules and by-laws framed by them. After the trifurcation, the North Delhi Municipal Corporation and South MCD were given 104 wards each, while East MCD had 64 in mostly the trans-Yamuna area.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Key Provisions related to Delhi

- Delhi's status as a Union Territory with a Legislative Assembly is an outcome of the 69th Amendment Act. The act introduced Articles 239AA and 239BB in the Constitution.
- The administrator appointed under article 239 gets designated as the Lieutenant Governor. There shall be a council of ministers to aid and advise LG.
- Provisions related to public order, police and land are not under the jurisdiction of the Government of Delhi. The Union Government will maintain these provisions.
- **Article 239AA(3)(b)** allows Parliament to make laws for Delhi 'on any matter'.
- **Article 239AA(4)** mandates that in case of a difference of opinion between the L-G and the Council of Ministers, the L-G has to refer the issue to the President.
- Until the decision is pending before the President, the L-G can use his discretion to take immediate action if urgency requires him/her to take an action.

2018 Judgment of the Supreme Court

- The Court said Delhi is different from every other UT and is in 'a class by itself'. The Court further said that the principles of democracy and federalism must be reinforced in NCT of Delhi in their truest sense.
- The elected representatives and the council of ministers of Delhi, being accountable to the voters of Delhi, must have the appropriate powers so as to perform their functions effectively and efficiently.
- The ideas of pragmatic federalism and collaborative federalism will be destroyed if the Union Government has overriding executive powers even in respect of matters for which the Delhi legislative assembly has legislative powers.

What are the Key provisions of the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022?

Unification of Municipal Corporations in Delhi: The Act **replaces the three municipal corporations by one Corporation** named the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

Powers of the Delhi government: The 2011 Amendment gave numerous powers to the Delhi government. This included deciding the total number of seats of councillors, number of seats reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes, division of the area of corporations into zones and wards, delimitation of wards etc. However these **powers would now be exercised by the Union Government**.

Number of councillors: The earlier Act provided that the number of seats in the three corporations taken together should not be more than 272. The amended act states that the total number of seats in the new Corporation **should not be more than 250**.

Removal of Director of Local Bodies: The earlier Act provided for a Director of Local Bodies to assist the Delhi government and discharge certain functions which include: **(a)** Coordinating between Corporations; **(b)** Framing recruitment Rules for various posts, and **(c)** Coordinating the collection and sharing of toll tax collected by the respective Corporations. The amended Act **omits the provision for a Director** of Local Bodies.

e-governance system for citizens: The amended Act adds some obligatory functions of the new corporation. This will include establishing an e-governance system for citizen services on an anytime-anywhere basis for better, accountable, and transparent administration.

Conditions of service for sweepers: The earlier Act provided that a sweeper employed for doing house scavenging of a building would be required to give a reasonable cause or a 14 day notice before discontinuing his service. The new act seeks to omit this provision.

What is the rationale behind the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Act, 2022?

Unequal Resource Distribution: The trifurcation **divided resources unequally and created a financial crisis** in the civic bodies. Due to the demography of Delhi, the South body ended up with the most 'posh' colonies – A and B category taxation zones that **paid higher property taxes**. The North body, on the other hand, got more un-authorized and lower taxation category colonies, which pay less tax, or not at all.

Stress on Municipalities: The trifurcation **tripled the number of officers, increased costs and resulted in unequal distribution of assets and liabilities**. The North, being the owner of the biggest civic body, also became the most top-heavy. The North Corporation is struggling with a deficit of over Rs 1,300 crore and East of around Rs 800 crore.

Rising Discontent: *Safai karamcharis*, medical staff, healthcare workers, engineers, doctors and nurses have gone off the streets since 2015 at least 50 times, in protest against salary delays, bonuses and cashless medical cards.

What are the objections to the Act in the context of Federalism?

The Central government's stance is that the amendment has been passed in consonance with **Article 239AA** of the Constitution. It is a provision that provides for special status to Delhi. Further the law is based on the power of Parliament under Article 239AA(3)(b) to make laws for Delhi 'on any matter'.

However, some constitution experts have argued that the Union Government has overlooked **Part IXA** of the Constitution. It specifically states that it will be the Legislature of the State that will be empowered to make laws concerning representation to the municipalities.

The argument of the Centre that Article 239AA can be applied over and above Part IXA of the Constitution does not hold good as the latter is a specific law that will override the general law relatable to Article 239AA.

What are the other criticisms surrounding the new act?

Large Scale Usurpation: The Centre has taken away significant powers from the Government of Delhi. This includes: **(a)** Power to determine the number of wards, extent of each ward, reservation of seats, number of seats of the Corporation; **(b)** Power to decide on matters such as salary and allowances, leave of absence of the Commissioner, the sanctioning of consolidation of loans by a corporation etc..

Against Decentralization: The interference of the Centre in matters such as municipal issues appears against the model of decentralization. A reduction in the degree of decentralization may further impede grassroot democracy and local governance.

Lack of Consultation: The Act has been passed without any consultation with the Delhi government.

Undermines the 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court: The Court said that the Constitution has mandated a federal balance wherein certain independence is assured to the State Governments. It also said that a balanced federal structure mandates that the Union does not usurp powers of States and the States enjoy freedom without any unsolicited interference from the Central Government.

Political Considerations: Many experts have criticized that merger of MCD is being undertaken to win the upcoming municipal elections in Delhi.

What lies ahead?

First, the Act might be challenged in Court. A new tussle might emerge between the Union and Delhi government.

Second, the Union Government should be willing to do cautious and effective consultation on the new Act with the Delhi Government and other concerned stakeholders. This will help in addressing the opposition and enhance the acceptability of the act.

Conclusion

In essence, the proposed law effectively takes the Delhi government out of the picture in terms of decision-making in the unified corporation. While the merger of MCD has certain benefits, the concerns related to interference of the Centre in matters such as municipal issues are valid. It goes against the model of decentralization. Such concerns need redressal.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, PRS

[Kurukshetra April Summary] Rural Women: Integral for Atmanirbhar Bharat – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

New India envisions rural India as an asset with great potential to speed up its economic development. Looking at the spree of recent schemes targeting well-being of rural women, empowerment of rural women seems to be at the heart of a plan to attain the dream of an *Atma Nirbhar Bharat*. These measures have opened avenues for access to education, productive resources, capacity building, skill development, healthcare facilities and diversified livelihood opportunities. They have evolved the rural ecosystem and facilitated socio-economic empowerment of women in India.

What is the current status of Rural Women?

In 2011-12, workforce participation rate for urban male and urban female are 54.6% and 14.7% respectively, whilst rural male and rural female are 54.3% and 24.8%. In 2018-19, the female labour force participation rate was 19.7% and 16.1% for rural and urban women respectively.

In rural communities, agriculture and allied sectors are the primary source of livelihood for 80% of all economically active rural women. 33% percent among them constitute the agricultural labour force and 48% are self-employed farmers.

Read More: Female Labour Force in India – Trends and Challenges – Explained, pointwise

Why is the need to focus on the empowerment of Rural Women?

Boosting Economy: Empowerment of rural women would result in improving their productivity and skills. This will enable them to set up their own ventures and boost the rural economy, especially the agricultural sector. This would help in achieving the goal of making India a US$ 5 trillion by 2024-25.

Food Security: Agriculture employs about 80% of rural women. A gender focus will help in improving their food and nutritional security. This will in turn help in tackling poverty and hunger across the nation.

In 2011, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) projected that women-oriented reforms in agriculture would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5-4%.

Poverty Alleviation: Skilling of rural women is essential for providing an additional helping hand to the family that can generate additional income and result in poverty alleviation. The NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty report shows 25.01% of the population was multidimensionally poor in the country in 2015-16. However the poverty ratio was as high as 32.75% in rural areas.

Demographic Dividend: India is one of the youngest countries in the world with an average age of around 29 years as per the recent UN estimates. This gives it a window of demographic dividend which can be duly harnessed only when rural women are truly empowered.

Global Commitments: The Sustainable Development Goals need to be completed by 2030. Amongst them some of the targets like SDG -5 (Gender Equality) can't be fully utilized without empowering the rural women.

What are the major challenges faced by Rural Women?

Poor Literacy Rate: Low level of education among rural women is one of the main causes of their dismal participation in developmental activities.

Triple burden on rural women: Home-making, agriculture and child upbringing are all responsibilities of women. This leaves no time for skilling.

Wage Inequality: There is widespread disparity in wages of men and women. Women are paid less for doing the same level of work for the same duration.

Lack of Ownership of Resources: The ownership of land and other economic sources by rural women is very less in comparison to male counterparts. This reduces their bargaining power in the family and reduce their decision making power.

Patriarchal Mindset: This induces people to look at women as an inferior being to men. It makes parents to focus less on women education and save more for their marriage. Moreover they are encouraged to work only in compelling times when the male members are unable to earn requisite money for the family.

What steps have been taken by the government for empowerment of Rural Women?

Concept of 'Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture': It was created by the government to encourage participation of rural women in agriculture. The mission was to ensure access to ongoing women-oriented schemes and resources across rural setups.

Outcome: With pro-women initiatives, percentage of female operational holding in the country has increased from 12.78% during 2010-11 to 13.78% during 2015-16 (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2019).

Ease of Living: Initiatives like *Ujjwala Yojana* (Clean Fuel), *Jal Jeevan Mission* (Tap water to every household) and *Swachh Bharat Mission* (Gramin) have played a pivotal role in improving living conditions of rural women.

Outcome: About 101 districts, 1,159 blocks, 67,473 Gram Panchayats and 1,39,366 villages have achieved '*Har Ghar Jal*' Status in the country.

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

Safety and Security: Mission *Shakti*, an umbrella scheme, is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This scheme includes setting up of National, State and District level Hubs for empowerment of women, women helplines, one stop centers, *Sakhi Niwas* or working women hostels, *Shakti Sadans* or homes for destitute and troubled women, crèches, etc.

Outcome: The setting up of *Mahila Shakti Kendras* (NM) at district level has provided safety and security to rural women.

Skill Development and Entrepreneurship: *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana* (PMKVY) provides several short duration skill training programmes for rural youth and women to earn their livelihood.

Similarly, Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (RSETI) provide several skill training courses. This includes making of homemade incense sticks (Agarbatti), soft toys, papad, pickle, masala powder, beauty parlour management and costume jewellery, etc.

Outcome: Under the RSETI scheme, 10 training courses out of the total 64 are exclusively for women candidates. Under this programme, about 26.28 lakh women candidates have been trained since inception.

Read More: [Kurukshetra April Summary] Women Entrepreneurs – Explained, pointwise

Financial Empowerment: The financial inclusion and accessibility to banking through *Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana* (PMJDY) has boosted prospects of rural women participation in the formal sector.

Outcome: . Since the implementation of this scheme, 43.04 crore accounts have been opened in the country. Further, this constitutes 55.47 percent (23.87 crore) women account holders and 66.69 percent (28.70 crore) are Jan Dhan accounts in rural and semi-urban areas.

What more should be done?

First, the government should ensure that **political representation of women** is duly enhanced by proper implementation of women reservation at local levels. This will help in formulation of more women centric policies and initiatives.

Further focus should also be placed on **tackling the development of *Sarpanch Pati* syndrome** that undermines the sanctity of elected women candidates.

Second, the government should **collaborate with NGOs like *Saheli*** in order to sensitize the masses on gender equality. This is needed to tackle son meta preference and ensure equitable distribution of ancestral wealth among the children.

Third, there should be **creation of more women-led Self Help groups** in rural India in order to enhance the economic capabilities of women. It will require proper implementation of schemes like SHG-Bank linkage program and learning from successful examples like *Kudumbashree* model of Kerala.

Read More: [Yojana September Summary] SHG-led Women Empowerment – Explained, pointwise

Conclusion

Rural transformation can be expedited by scaling up programmes for rural women's empowerment. Skill development, access to education, healthcare, safe and secure environment, ownership rights, and new technology can play a significant role in improving the lives of rural women. Empowering women farmers will enhance agriculture productivity and help in building an empowered nation.

Source: Kurukshetra April 2022

Marginal Cost of Funds-based Lending Rates (MCLR) – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

State Bank of India has raised the marginal cost of funds-based lending rates (MCLR) for the first time in three years. SBI raised the MCLR by 10 basis points (bps) across tenures to 7.1% (from 7% earlier). Other public sector and private banks are set to raise MCLRs in the coming days. It signals that the soft rates regime that has prevailed since 2019 may be over. As a result, borrowers who have taken home, vehicle, and personal loans will find their equated monthly instalments (EMIs) rising in the coming months.

What is MCLR?

It is the minimum interest rate that a bank can lend at. The final rate of lending also includes **risk premium** and **spread** charged by banks.

MCLR is a tenor-linked internal benchmark, which means the rate is determined **internally by the bank** depending on the period left for the repayment of a loan.

MCLR is closely linked to the actual deposit rates and **calculated based on four components:** **(a)** The marginal cost of funds; **(b)** Negative carry on account of cash reserve ratio; **(c)** Operating costs; **(d)** Tenor premium.

Under the MCLR regime, banks are free to offer all categories of loans on fixed or floating interest rates.

Fixed-rate loans with tenors of up to three years are also priced according to MCLR. Banks review and publish MCLR of different maturities, every month.

Certain loan rates, like that of fixed-rate loans with tenors above three years and special loan schemes offered by the government, are not linked to MCLR.

Key Terminologies

Repo Rate: It is the rate at which the central bank of a country (Reserve Bank of India in case of India) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds.

Reverse Repo Rate: It is the rate at which the central bank of a country (Reserve Bank of India in case of India) borrows money from commercial banks within the country.

Standing Deposit Facility: It allows banks to park their excess funds at a higher rate but **without taking any collateral** from the central bank.

Internal Benchmark Lending Rate (IBLR): These are a set of reference lending rates which are calculated after considering factors like the bank's current financial overview, deposits and non performing assets (NPAs) etc. Some of IBLR include Base rate, MCLR etc..

External Benchmark Lending Rate (EBLR): Under this, lending rate is linked to a benchmark rate. RBI has offered banks the option to choose from 4 external benchmarking mechanisms: **(a)** The RBI repo rate; **(b)** The 91-day Treasury-bill yield; **(c)** The 182-day Treasury-bill yield; **(d)** Any other benchmark market interest rate as developed by the Financial Benchmarks India Pvt. Ltd.

What is the background of MCLR?

The Reserve Bank of India introduced the MCLR methodology for fixing interest rates from 1 April 2016. It replaced the base rate structure, which had been in place since July 2010.

What is the difference between MCLR and Base Rate?

- MCLR is an advanced version of the base rate.
- The base rate uses the average finance cost, but MCLR is based on the **marginal or incremental cost of money**.
- When calculating the base rate, a minimum rate of return/profit margin is used, whereas, for MCLR, banks are required to include tenor premium into the calculation. Tenor is the amount of time left for repayment of the loan. Higher the duration of the loan, higher will be the risk. Thus banks charge a higher rate of interest for long-term loans.

MCLR is applicable to corporate loans and floating rate loans taken before October 2019. RBI had then switched to the external benchmark linked lending rate (EBLR) system where lending rate is linked to benchmark rates like repo or Treasury Bill rates.

The banks failed to reduce the interest rate in spite of lower repo rates under the IBLR regime. This impeded the **monetary policy transmission** and gave way to External Benchmark Lending Rates.

Banks linked their EBLR to the RBI's repo rate, which declined from 5.40% to 4% since October 2019. When the RBI hikes the repo rate, EBLR goes up and vice versa.

MCLR-linked loans had the largest share (53.1%) of the loan portfolio of banks as of December 2021. The share of EBLR loans in total advances was 39.2% in December 2021, according to the RBI.

Why was MCLR introduced?

It ensures that banks must adjust their Interest Rates as soon as the repo rate changes.

It is implemented to bring **transparency and uniformity** in the interest rate on advances given by banks.

It ensures that the interest rate on loans is equally fair and beneficial for the banks and the borrowers. As a result, it helps banks improve their long-run value and become more competitive using marginal cost pricing of loans.

Why has MCLR been hiked?

First, the 'extraordinary' liquidity measures undertaken in the wake of the pandemic, combined with the liquidity injected through various other operations of the RBI have left a **liquidity overhang** of the order of Rs 8.5 lakh crore in the system.

Banks expected the repo rate — the main policy rate — to go up from June onwards as the RBI seeks to suck out liquidity from the system to **rein in inflation. Therefore banks were apprehensive of an interest rate hike.**

Second, the yield on 10-year benchmark government bonds has reached 7.15%, rising 24 bps in less than 2 weeks. This indicated an upward pressure on interest rates as a rising yield increases the cost of funds.

Third, On April 8, the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee **restored the policy rate corridor under the liquidity adjustment facility** to the pre-pandemic width of 50 bps. It introduced the Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) at 3.75 as the floor of this corridor.

SDF is an additional tool employed by the RBI to absorb excess liquidity. In essence, overnight rates were hiked to 3.75% and SDF made the reverse repo rate redundant for now.

What impact does an increase in MCLR have?

First, borrowers who have taken home, vehicle, and personal loans will find their equated monthly installments (EMIs) rising in the coming months.

Second, it would be **more costlier to procure loans** as people would now have to pay higher interest rates than the past levels. This may lead to **crowding out** of various potential loan seekers.

Third, according to the SBI research report, deposit rates are likely to "increase meaningfully" over the next one-two months. SBI now offers 5.10% interest in the 1-2-year bucket.

This means a fixed deposit holder is sitting on a negative return of 185 basis points, as inflation is now at 6.95%. However, rising MCLR will help increase deposit rates.

What lies ahead?

First, the RBI is set to **withdraw the accommodative policy** (the willingness to expand money supply to boost economic growth) as retail retail inflation was at 6.95% in March and wholesale inflation at 14.55%. This will increase the lending rates in the coming months.

Second, the US Federal Reserve recently announced a tightening of the policy and raised interest rates. This will create pressure on Indian banks to raise interest rates.

Third, given that the spread between bond yields and repo rate jumps in an increasing interest rate cycle, bond yields could touch 7.75% by September.

Fourth, people who have **sufficient savings can prepay their loans** or atleast enhance their EMI amount in order to reduce the burden of rising MCLR in future.

Conclusion

The next round of rate hikes is expected around May-June 2022. However, the rise in rates is likely to be gradual. The rise in rate is imperative to control the inflation and move up from the historic low levels as both policy rates were last reduced in May 2020, with repo at 4% and reverse repo at 3.35%, and have since been kept at these historic lows.

Source: Indian Express, Indian Express, Mint

COVID-19 Vaccine and TRIPS IP Waiver – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

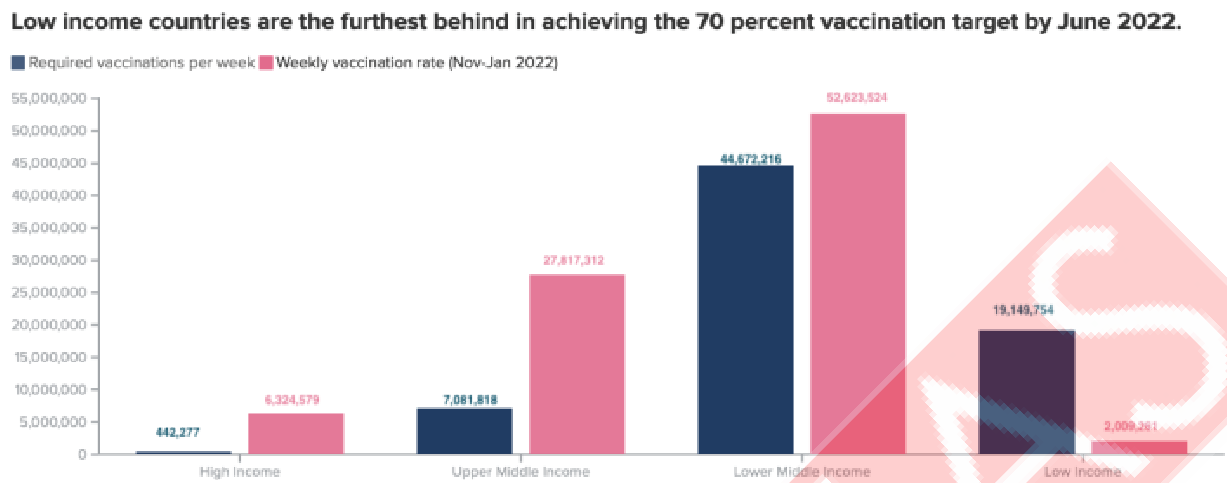
The pandemic has tested the resilience of the global community on various fronts such as whether it can unite to ensure the availability of COVID-19 medical products for everyone. In this regard, India and South Africa, in October 2020, gave a clarion call at the World Trade Organization (WTO) demanding that key provisions of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement be temporarily waived. The developed world, especially the European Union (EU), kept dragging its feet on this while the virus raged on. Now, after long discussions, a **deal has been brokered between the EU, the U.S., India, and South Africa** on the issue of the TRIPS IP waiver. This deal will now be presented to the entire WTO membership to be accepted at the forthcoming ministerial meeting. However, this deal is a classic case of too little, too late, and represents a significant climb down from the original proposal of India and South Africa.

What was the original proposal regarding TRIPS IP Waiver?

India and South Africa contended that the application and enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs) were hindering timely provisioning of affordable medical products to the patients. They argued that 'rapid scaling up of manufacturing globally' was an obvious crucial solution to address the timely availability and affordability of medical products to all countries in need. To ensure this, **IPRs must be waived for at least 3 years** and medical products should be treated as global public goods.

Why has India demanded a complete TRIPS IP waiver?

First, there are grave inequalities in vaccine availability and access across different countries. Data from Oxfam International reveals that, as of May 2021, people in the G-7 countries were **77 times more likely to have been vaccinated** than those living in the world's poorest nations. As of 30 January 2022, more than 3 billion people around the world were still waiting to receive their first COVID-19 vaccine dose. (UNDP)



In case of Low Income Countries, the vaccination rate is only 10% of the target rate. For High Income Countries the vaccination rate is 1430% more than the target rate. (Source: UNDP)

Second, the **ethical principles of non-maleficence and justice** are violated if developed countries deprive other countries of access to vaccines.

Third, the **fundamental rights of life and liberty are basic human rights** and should take precedence over ownership and property rights, especially in times of a health emergency.

Why are the arguments against a complete TRIPS IP waiver?

First, patents **deliver economic growth** by preventing infringement of intellectual property and making inventions profitable. Complete waiver leaves little incentive for producers to innovate and produce that good.

Second, pharma companies are business entities aiming for profit. They cannot be expected to act in a completely altruistic manner.

What are the details of the agreed proposal?

The draft 'compromise outcome' adopts the approach that the EU has been proposing all along — namely, **granting compulsory licences** to enhance vaccine production.

According to the draft, countries are **no longer required to honor Article 31(f) of TRIPS**. Article 31(f) requires countries to ensure that products produced under a compulsory license are predominantly for the domestic market. The draft waiver allows countries to export any proportion of vaccines to eligible countries. However, this waiver is subject to several notification requirements: **(a)** Eligible members are obligated to **prevent re-exportation of COVID-19 vaccines** that they have imported; **(b)** The eligible countries which issue a compulsory license for COVID-19 vaccines have to **notify certain details to the WTO**. These include information about the entity that has been authorized to produce the product, the quantities, duration, and the list of countries to which the vaccines are being exported; **(c)** WTO members would be **able to issue compulsory licences even if their domestic patent laws do not have the provision to issue compulsory license**. Compulsory licences can even be granted using executive orders, emergency decrees, and judicial or administrative orders.

What is Compulsory Licensing?

Compulsory licensing(CL) is a process that allows governments to license third parties (that is, parties other than the patent holders) to produce, use and sell a patented product or process. By that, producers can **manufacture patented drugs without the requirement of consent of patent owners**. The WTO's agreement on intellectual property –**TRIPS** allows countries to issue compulsory licenses to domestic producers.

In India, Compulsory licensing is allowed and regulated under the Indian Patent Act, 1970. **Section 84 of the (Indian) Patent Act,1970** provides that after three years from the date of the grant of a patent, any person can apply for the compulsory license, on certain grounds: **(a)** The reasonable requirements of the public with respect to the patented invention have not been satisfied; **(b)** The patented invention is not available to the public at a reasonably affordable price; **(c)** The patented invention is not used in the territory of India.

Compulsory licenses can also be granted under exceptional circumstances.

Section 92 of the (Indian) Patent Act,1970: It authorizes the Union Government to issue a compulsory license at any time after the grant of the patent, in the case of: **(a)** National emergency; **(b)** Extreme urgency; **(c)** Case of public non-commercial use.

What are the shortcomings associated with the new proposal?

First, the draft new waiver **includes only COVID-19 vaccines** and excludes other COVID-19 medical products. This is a major handicap as medicines also play an equally important role in combating the pandemic.

Second, the draft waiver proposes to **waive only patents and not other IP rights**. India's original stand was that all IP rights, not just patents, be waived. The accessibility of COVID-19 medical products will be held up in absence of waiver.

Third, there are **multiple procedural requirements** which the countries need to fulfill with respect to the WTO if they grant a waiver. This will increase the transaction costs and may deter countries from using the system. Moreover, these conditions are over and above those mandated by TRIPS.

Fourth, the **draft waiver is not universal**. Only those developing countries that exported less than 10% of world exports of COVID-19 vaccine doses in 2021 are covered for exportation and importation. There is **no mention of least developed countries**.

Fifth, when compulsory licences are granted, the patent holder receives adequate remuneration, but "**transfer of know-how is not ensured**". This would make it difficult to scale up production of COVID-19 vaccines, medicines, and medical devices in the developing world. This will constrain their availability at affordable prices.

What other steps have been taken to increase availability of COVID-19 Vaccine?

The Open Covid Pledge: Several companies came together for 'The Open Covid Pledge', which hands out "non-exclusive and royalty-free" licences for covid products.

It provides an open framework under which patent holders can voluntarily pledge not to assert the exclusivity of their rights to manufacture, use, sell, reproduce and import these products.

Covax initiative: It is an initiative led by the World Health Organization, Gavi the Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. It aims to ensure rapid, fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all the countries around the world.

What more should be done?

First, considerable **support should be given to the vaccine manufacturers by government and nonprofit organizations**. For instance, the Indian Council of Medical Research provided funding for covid vaccine development. Similarly, Pune-based Serum Institute of India developed a vaccine for meningitis for use in Africa. Development occurred with help from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Path, a non-profit group that works for health equity.

Second, governments should **commit to purchase vaccines from manufacturers in advance**, thereby directing research resources at clearly targeted goals and appropriate projects. For instance, **Operation Warp Speed** in the US led to the rapid development and roll-out of COVID-19 vaccine—by assuring pharma companies decent profits.

Third, **vaccines could be bought at an international level** (say by the United Nations or World Bank) for developing countries. They would pay a single price and then payments could be collected from these countries depending on their income levels. This will help in countering the adverse effects of monopoly pricing.

Fourth, **Patent pools** can be used to improve vaccine access by coordinating the actions of complementary patent holders. Similarly, **reference pricing** may be used by governments to reduce the prices of branded as well as generic drugs and vaccines.

Fifth, countries can **use their competition laws** to restrict patent abuse. For instance, India's Competition Act of 2002 can be used to examine whether the high price or inadequate availability of a drug is the result of anti-competitive practices or 'abuse of a dominant position'.

Conclusion

Domestic patent laws and international conventions must aim to foster innovation. But at the same time, they should not have the effect of reducing vaccine accessibility in instances of dire need, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These two should not be looked upon as separate government policies, but must act in a complementary manner, with the balance shifting in accordance with the state of public health in the country.

Source: Mint, The Hindu, The Hindu

Coal Shortage in India – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Russia's attack on Ukraine has led to sudden rise in global commodity prices. Russia is the largest exporter of natural gas, fertilizers and wheat. It's the second largest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia. In terms of coal, it is the third largest exporter globally. The supply of these commodities has been negatively impacted owing to the numerous sanctions imposed by the west on Russia. This includes coal with the prices going up big time. Countries dependent on coal imports will be impacted, including India, where coal shortage is becoming acute.

About Coal Reserves in India

It is the most important and abundant fossil fuel in India. It accounts for 55% of the country's energy needs. The country's industrial heritage was built upon indigenous coal. The Coal resources of India are mainly available in older Gondwana Formations of peninsular India and younger Tertiary formations of north-eastern region.

Coal is India's most abundant fossil fuel. As of 1 April 2020, **the total geological reserves of coal in India stood at a little over 344 billion tonnes**.

Hard coal deposits spread over 27 major coalfields, are mainly confined to eastern and south central parts of the country. The lignite reserves stand at a level around 36 billion tonnes, of which 90 % occur in the southern State of Tamil Nadu.

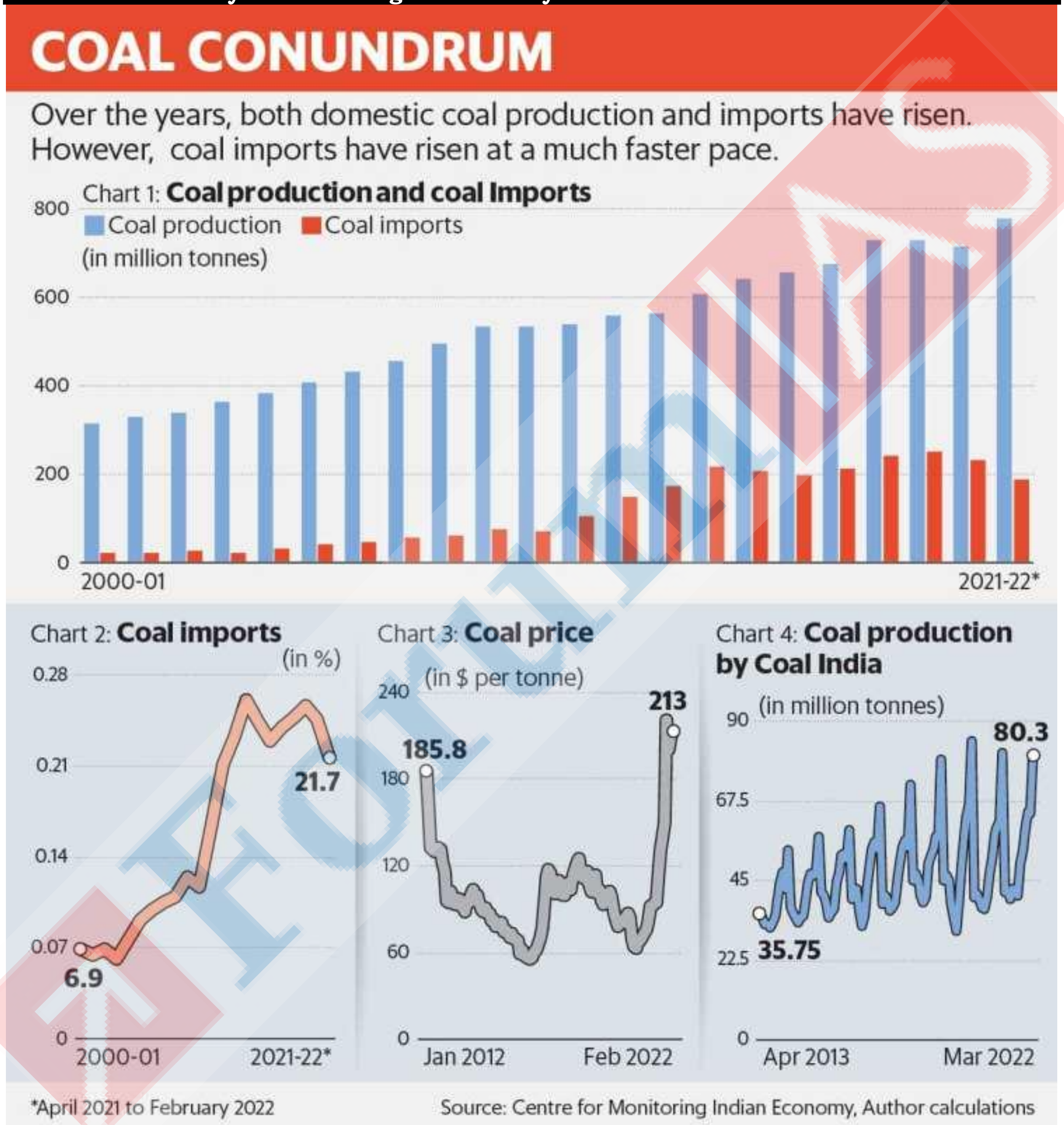
What is the current status of coal stocks?

India is the 2nd largest producer and consumer of coal in the world after China. Coal stocks at power plants across the country are down in comparison to their normal levels. The insufficient stocks of coal are reflected in data released regularly by the **National Power Portal (NPP),** which tracks the coal stocks at thermal power plants across the country.

As of April 21, the thermal power plants across the country had **a total stock of 21.9 million tonnes (MT) of coal**. The daily usage of coal at these plants stood at 2.7MT.

This means that the power plants have **enough coal for eight days**. This is much better than the stock of four to five days that these plants held in October but significantly lower than their long-term average in April which is 17 days. NPP data suggests that the stock levels in 108 out of the 173 power plants are at critical levels. As of 1 April, the stock levels at 80 power plants were in a critical situation. The stock level at a thermal power plant is deemed to be critical if coal stock is less than 25% of normative coal stock. India is thus facing an acute coal shortage.

How has the coal dynamics changed over the years?



Source: Mint

Chart 1 shows that over the years, both domestic coal production and imports have risen. Chart 2 on the other hand shows that imports have been rising as a proportion of total coal consumption in India.

More than two decades back in 2000-01, coal imports formed just 6.9% of the overall coal consumption. Over the years, they have increased to around one-fourth of the overall coal consumption, peaking in 2014-15 at 26.1%. In 2021-22, for the period from April 2021 to February 2022, coal imports made up around 21.7% of the overall coal consumption during the period.

What are the reasons behind the rise in imports?

Increase in Coal Based Thermal Power plants: As of March 2001, the total installed capacity of these plants had stood at 60,935 MW. By February 2022, this had gone up to 235,929 MW, an increase of close to 300%. The plants demanded more coal for electricity generation.

Demand from other sectors: Coal is also used for manufacturing steel and cement, among other things. The production of finished steel (alloy and non-alloy) has gone up from 29.3 MT in 2000-01 to 113.6 MT in 2021-22. The production of cement is also expected to go up to 379 MT in 2021-22.

Slow growth in Domestic Production: Since 2001, the coal production within the country has increased at the rate of 4.4% per year. However this increase was unable to meet the rising demand.

What are the reasons behind the current coal shortage in India?

Fall in Imports: The imports in 2021-22 (April 2021 to February 2022) have come down. They had stood at 198.9 MT during April 2020 to February 2021. They came down by 5% during April 2021 to February 2022 to 188.8 MT. This was primarily on account of coal prices going up dramatically, making coal imports unviable. The situation got even more troublesome post the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Reduction in Domestic Supply: It has been disrupted due to the reduced availability of railway rakes to transport coal. Further, historical data between 2013 and 2021 tells us that on an average, Coal India produced 67.5 MT of coal in March. In April, the average production was 40.6 MT or only around three-fifths of the production level in March.

Rising Demand: There has been an increase in the demand for electricity as the economy has recovered. Further, the early onset of summer has led to an increased usage of air conditioners, fans, coolers and refrigeration.

During a period of 15 days ending 10 April, the demand for electricity went up by 9.5% in comparison to the same period in 2021.

What steps have already been taken to address coal shortage and augment supply?

Improved Auctioning Mechanism: Auction of commercial mining on **Revenue Sharing Mechanism** was launched in 2020. Further, in order to expedite the process for conducting auctions and to carry out more rounds of auction in a year, a mechanism of **rolling auctions** of coal mines has been planned.

Single Window Clearance: It was launched in 2021 for the coal sector to speed up the operationalisation of coal mines. It is a unified platform that facilitates grant of clearances and approvals required for starting a coal mine in India.

Allowed sale of excess coal production: The government amended the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act in 2021. The amendment paved the way for releasing of additional coal in the market by greater utilization of mining capacities of captive coal and lignite blocks. These were being only partly utilized owing to limited production of coal for meeting only their captive needs.

Coal India Ltd. has envisaged a coal production programme of one Billion Tonne from CIL mines by the year 2023-24. CIL has taken the following steps to achieve the target of augmentation of coal production capacity: **(a)** 15 Projects identified with a Capacity of about 160 MTPA (Million

Tonnes per Annum) to be operated by Mine Developer cum Operator mode; **(b)** Capacity addition through special dispensation in Environment Clearance under clause 7(ii) of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 2006; **(c)** CIL has taken steps to upgrade the mechanized coal transportation and loading system under 'First Mile Connectivity' projects.

What lies ahead?

First, the coal shortage might result in **more power outages in summer** and a diversion of coal away from non-power sectors (e.g., aluminium, cement, steel), weighing on industrial output and increasing electricity costs.

Second, the coal shortage **could become another stagflationary shock**. The word stagflation is a combination of stagnation and inflation. It typically refers to an environment of high inflation and slow economic growth. Some of **this shock can be lessened if railway rakes can be made available quickly**.

Third, Coal fuelled power generation plants which are under the corporate insolvency resolution process can be allowed to commence operations immediately, regardless of the stage of the proceedings at NCLT. This will save the coal transport time and quantity limitations in coal transportation to non-pit head coal plants.

Fourth, India can also **enter into an agreement with Russia for buying coal** at lower prices. It has already bought discounted oil from the nation amidst western sanctions.

Fifth, in the long term focus should be placed on **enhancing solar, wind and other renewable sources of power**. This will reduce dependence on coal and improve pollution levels in the country.

Conclusion

India needs to augment its domestic production capacity and enter into long term contracts with major coal producing nations for ensuring a steady supply of coal. The country must acknowledge its huge dependency on coal and gradually scale up its clean sources of power in the spirit of the UN's sustainable development goals.

Source: **Mint**, **PIB**

India-UK Relationship – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

India and the United Kingdom have shared historic ties for several centuries. India-UK have a Strategic Partnership since 2004. The India-UK relationship is multi-faceted spanning across trade and economy, health, science & technology, defence & security, people-to-people relations, climate change and close cooperation on multilateral issues. The Prime Minister of the UK visited India on April 21-22, 2022. In the bilateral talks, the Prime Ministers of India and the UK appreciated the progress made on the Roadmap 2030 launched at the Virtual Summit in May 2021. Both the leaders reiterated their commitment to pursue a more robust and action oriented cooperation across the full spectrum of bilateral relations.

What are the key outcomes of the bilateral meeting?

The PMs appreciated the progress in ongoing FTA negotiations and implementation of the Enhanced Trade Partnership.

Cyber Cooperation: Both sides issued a **Joint Statement for further intensifying cooperation on Cyber Security** particularly in the areas of cyber governance, cyber deterrence and safeguarding critical national infrastructure.

MoUs: The visit resulted in signing of several MOUs: **(1) Government to Government MOUs**: **(a)** MoU on Implementation of Global Innovation Partnership; **(b)** MoU on Cooperation on Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership; **(2) Non Governmental MOUs**: **(a)** MoU on establishment of short term Chair at Birmingham City University between ICCR and Birmingham City University; **(b)** Joint Declaration of Intent for cooperation in the field of Offshore Wind Development; **(c)** Memorandum of Understanding on the creation of The Chevening/Adani Scholarships on Artificial Intelligence; **(d)** MoU on satellite launch programme between New Space India Limited (NSIL) and OneWeb

Strategic Technology Dialogue: Ministerial-level dialogue on new and emerging communication technologies such as 5G, AI etc.

Collaboration on Integrated Electric Propulsion: Co-development of technology between the two Navies.

What progress has been made in the India-UK relationship?

Economic: During 2019-20, trade between the two countries stood at US$ 15.45 billion with the balance in favor of India. Between April 2021-February 2022, Indian exports to the UK stood at US$ 9.4 billion (2.5% of India's exports). The imports in the corresponding period were US$ 6.59 billion (1.2% of India's imports). There is a scope for significant improvement. Both countries expect that the bilateral trade can reach US$ 100 billion by 2030.

Defense and Security: India and the UK signed the Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP) in November 2015. It provides a strategic roadmap and direction to the evolving India-UK Defence Relations. At present some 70 companies in the UK supply goods for aircraft and related equipment besides supporting platforms like the Jaguar, Mirage and Kiran aircraft.

Indian Diaspora: Around 1.5 million people of Indian origin live in Britain. Indian diaspora are making significant contributions to the British Society. This includes 15 Members of Parliament, three members in Cabinet, and two in high office as Finance and Home Ministers.

Education: The UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) was launched in 2005. A new 'UKEIRI Mobility Programme: Study in India' was also launched in 2019. Under this Britain's universities collaborate with Indian partners and send UK students to India.

Health: The successful partnership between Oxford University, AstraZeneca and SII on COVID-19 vaccine demonstrated the potential of Indian and UK expertise working together to solve international challenges. The two sides are also working on pandemic preparedness, Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), digital health, Ayurveda and alternative medicines, as well as health worker mobility.

What is the significance of India-UK Relationship?

Regional and global issues of mutual interest: A healthy relationship between the two is imperative for enhancing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Afghanistan, UNSC, G20 and Commonwealth. For instance, India welcomed the UK's accession in the Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative under the Maritime Security pillar.

Tackling Climate Change: The cooperation between them can be helpful to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and in implementing the Glasgow Climate Pact. For instance, the countries have agreed to work for early operationalisation of the **Global Green Grids-One Sun One World One Grid** Initiative (OSOWOG) under ISA. They are also working on the IRIS platform under CDRI which was jointly launched by India and UK at COP26.

Read More: GGI-OSOWOG project – Explained, pointwise

Supporting 3rd World Countries: Through the **Global Innovation Partnership**, India and UK have agreed to co-finance up to £ 75 million to support the transfer and scale up of climate smart sustainable innovations to third countries. The novel GIP Fund created under this Partnership will also aim to raise additional £ 100 million from the market to support Indian innovations.

Strategic Considerations: India can engage with the UK to counter China's rise in the Indian Ocean Region. The UK on other hand can use India as an alternative destination to China and its companies can invest in India as part of **China plus one strategy**. It is the business strategy to avoid investing only in China and diversify business into other countries.

What are the challenges in the India-UK Relationship?

No Free Trade Agreement: Despite a good bilateral relationship and occurrence of BREXIT, both the countries have not been able to conclude a Free trade agreement. This is required to take the relationship to the next level.

Different stand on Russia Ukraine conflict: The U.K has openly criticized the Russian invasion while the same is not being done by India. This hasn't impacted their bilateral relationship till now but it may emerge as a future bottleneck.

Extradition Rigidities: Both the countries have an extradition treaty between them but still speedy expedition doesn't take place. For instance, India hasn't been able to extradite Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and other fugitives from London.

Security concerns: Indian concerns include the presence of Khalistani elements and their activities in the UK, and the country's political views on Jammu and Kashmir.

Illegal Migrants: There are more than 1 lakh of illegal Indian immigrants in the UK. The UK government has put pressure to send them back but both the countries have not yet signed the migration and mobility agreement.

Concerns in Neighborhood: The growing partnership between India and UK may not be welcomed by China who may create more tensions on borders. Further, China's hostility is **preventing India from participating in initiatives like AUKUS**.

Read More: AUKUS Security Alliance – Explained, pointwise

What lies ahead?

First, the leaders have **agreed to conclude a comprehensive and balanced trade deal** by the end October 2022. The FTA would result in big jump in the bilateral trade.

Second, India and Britain may explore an agreement on "migration and mobility" to facilitate the legal movement of Indians into Britain.

Third, the UK should live up to its commitment to the extradition of Indian fugitives e.g., Nirav Modi should be extradited as his extradition process is almost completed.

Fourth, India should unequivocally convey its stance on initiatives like AUKUS in order to avoid any border tensions or deterioration of neighborhood relations.

Conclusion

As the world recovers from the COVID-19 Pandemic, both the countries need to focus on sustained economic recovery and work towards building national resilience and trusted partnerships to mitigate external disruptions.

Source: Indian Express, CNBC, MEA, MEA

Palm Oil Crisis and its Implications for India – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Indonesia, the world's biggest producer, exporter, and consumer of palm oil, will ban all exports of the commodity and its raw materials from April 28. The objective behind this decision is to reduce domestic shortages of cooking oil and bring down its skyrocketing prices. India is already grappling with record-high wholesale inflation. The export controls exercised by Indonesia in late January has led to a 38% rise in the landed cost of CPO (Crude Palm Oil) in India. The current palm oil crisis is going to make the situation worse for India which is the biggest importer of palm oil in the world.

What is Palm Oil?

Oil palm is a low maintenance, high yield, perennial plantation crop. It is one of the essential food items and widely used by a majority of Indians. Palm oil is widely used for **blending refined oils**. It is used as a cooking oil and is omnipresent in packaged and processed foods. It has widespread usage, in everything from cosmetics to processed food to cleaning products.

Palm oil **accounts for over a third of India's edible oil consumption**. Overall, India imports 60% of its requirements.

What is Palm Oil's status in the Global Supply Chain?

Palm oil is the **world's most widely used vegetable oil** with its global production in 2020 exceeding 73 million tonnes (MT), as per the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Output is estimated to be 77 MT for the current year. Palm oil is **preferred by many people across the globe as it is inexpensive** in comparison to other edible oils.

Indonesia and Malaysia together account for almost 90% of the global palm oil production, with Indonesia producing the largest quantity at over 43 MT in the 2021 crop year.

Palm oil makes up 40% of the global supply of the four most widely used edible oils: palm, soybean, rapeseed (canola), and sunflower oil. Indonesia is responsible for 60% of the global supply of palm oil.

What factors forced Indonesia to ban exports leading to the palm oil crisis?

Rise in Price of Palm Oil: The price of CPO (Crude Palm Oil) rose from an already high rate of $1,131 per metric tonne in 2021 to its highest ever price of $1,552 in February this year. The prices of palm oil rose this year due to: **(a) Short supply of alternative vegetable oils**: The production of soybean oil, the second most-produced oil, is expected to take a hit this year due to a **poor end soybean season in major producer Argentina**. The production of **canola oil was hit in Canada** last year due to drought; and supplies of **sunflower oil, 80-90% of which is produced by Russia and Ukraine**, has been badly hit due to the ongoing conflict; **(b) Impact of Pandemic**: The pandemic brought a series of lockdowns and reduced mobility of labor that impacted production of palm oil and increased global edible oil prices to record highs; **(c) Global Food inflation**: Food prices rose by almost 13% globally in March according to the United Nations. The rise in global prices pushed the price of palm oil as well.

Ineffectiveness of Price Capping and Export Quotas: Price Capping was 14,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) for branded oil and 11500 IDR for local products. Further, the government introduced a two-litre-per-person rule for buying cooking oil. Later on, export limits were also imposed. However, hoarding by consumers and sellers was witnessed. Further, rising global prices and low domestic prices of palm oil induced exporters to obtain illicit export permits amid the export restrictions. All this **created an acute shortage of cooking oil in Indonesia.**

Growing Demand of Palm Oil in other Sectors: The cooking oil shortage could in part also be attributed to Indonesia using **large quantities of CPO to make biodiesel.** In late 2019, the country increased the palm oil content to be used in biodiesel to 30%. Reuters reported that it used over 7 MT of palm oil out of its total national output of 41.4 MT in 2020, on biodiesel. The diversion has exacerbated the palm oil crisis.

What are the possible implications of the palm oil crisis?

Increase in Price of other edible oils: After the ban, the global prices of other vegetable oils saw spikes. The price of soybean oil jumped 4.5%, taking it to a record high of 83.21 cents per pound on the Chicago Board of Trade. Soy oil prices have already seen a 50% rise so far this year.

Impact on India: India is the **biggest importer of palm oil** which makes up 40% of its vegetable oil consumption, as per the USDA. India meets half of its annual need for 8.3 MT of palm oil from Indonesia. Despite the rising prices of the commodity, India's palm oil imports jumped 21% in March from the previous month as traders moved to secure alternatives to sunflower oil that could no longer be bought from Ukraine.

INDIA'S IMPORTS OF PALM OIL (IN LAKH TONNES)

Fiscal (Apr-Mar)	Crude palm oil		Refined palm oil		Total palm oil	
	Indonesia	Malaysia	Indonesia	Malaysia	Crude	Refined
2015-16	37.09	33.76	21.48	4.24	71.12	25.72
2016-17	33.37	19.61	23.15	6.27	53.56	29.43
2017-18	45.85	17.21	23.57	4.16	67.50	27.73
2018-19	41.57	17.13	16.78	7.17	64.15	25.21
2019-20	42.72	14.89	3.71	17.9	61.76	25.02
2020-21	40.95	27.99	1.13	0.05	73.92	1.32
2021-22*	21.27	28.43	6.93	2.15	59.78	11.19

*Apr-Jan. Source: Department of Commerce

Source: Indian Express

The export ban is expected to **push the prices even further**. It will also create additional **forex burden** and **enhance the already high Fiscal Deficit** of the country.

Further the **inflation level** in the country will also increase, creating trouble for the Monetary Policy Committee to keep CPI in the range of 2-6%. Inflation will occur as palm oil is used in a variety of products which are directly consumed by the masses including packaged foods, cosmetics etc.

The inaccessibility of affordable cooking oil may **enhance the level of hunger and malnutrition** in the country. India has already slipped to 101st position in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2021 of 116 countries, from its 2020 position of 94.

What steps have been taken by the Government to enhance oil palm production?

Since 1990s, the Government has taken several steps for palm oil production.

A comprehensive Centrally Sponsored Scheme named **Oil Palm Development Programme** (OPDP) was taken up during the Eighth & Ninth Plan (1992-2002).

During the Tenth and Eleventh Plan (2002-2012), the Government of India had provided support for oil palm cultivation under the Centrally Sponsored **Integrated Scheme of Oilseeds, Pulses, Oil Palm and Maize** (ISOPOM).

To boost oil palm cultivation, the Government of India had implemented a **Special Programme on Oil Palm Area Expansion** (OPAE) under RKVY from the year 2011-12 to 2014-15.

During the 12th Five Year Plan, a new **National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP)** was launched under which Mini Mission – II (MM – II) was dedicated to oil palm area expansion and productivity increases. MM – II of NMOOP was implemented in 12 States viz; Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh w.e.f. 01.04.2014.

In 2021, the government announced a **National Mission on Edible Oils- Oil Palm**. This mission, with a total outlay of INR 11000 crores, aims at making the country self-sufficient, by boosting the production of domestic oil palm. The mission plans to raise oil palm cultivation to one million hectares by 2025-26 and 1.7-1.8 million hectares by 2029-30. The mission has a special focus on the **North-eastern region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

What are impediments in boosting oil palm production in India?

Long gestation period and high level of investments: A palm is a monoculture crop with a long gestation period and requires a high level of investments. However, corporate sector investments in oil palm are limited compared to Malaysia and Indonesia.

Small landholding: Indian farmers generally have very small farm holdings which makes it non viable to produce oil palm. More than 80% of farmers have land holding of less than 2 hectare.

Environment Degradation: Production of oil palm sometimes requires clearing a vast tract of forest land which leads to environmental degradation and protests by environmentalists.

Exploitative Labor Practices: The labour working in Oil palm plantations are subjected to numerous hardships like poor pay, long working hours etc. due to the colonial hangover of plantation owners.

What lies ahead?

First, India **must engage in diplomatic talks with Indonesia** to get a special exemption for importing palm oil. It should also approach Malaysia and enter into a long term purchase agreement with the second biggest player.

Second, India **must diversify its edible oil mix** which is mainly composed of soy and palm oil. Together, imported palm and soy oil (12 MT) account for close to half of India's annual edible oil consumption.

Read More: Why Palm won't fix India's edible oil woes

Third, focus should be placed on **enhancing domestic production** by duly implementing the newly launched National Mission on Edible Oils- Oil Palm. Further, the government should give greater subsidies and support to oilseeds that are indigenous to India and suited for dryland agriculture. This can help achieve self-reliance without dependence on oil palm.

Fourth, India should **cooperate with other big buyers of Palm oil** so as to create a **collective pressure** on Indonesia for expeditiously removing the export ban.

Conclusion

The palm oil crisis and India's high degree of import dependence for Oil palm is a wake up call for the nation to diversify its edible oil mix and significantly boost the domestic production. This is imperative for tackling any future disruption in oil palm supply and attain self reliance.

Source: **Indian Express**, **The Hindu**

Sedition Law in India (Section 124A IPC) – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

The Supreme Court will take up for final hearing the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code dealing with the offence of sedition. The bench headed by the Chief Justice has asked the Union Government to file its reply by the end of the week and said the petitioners can provide their counter to the Centre's affidavit after its submission. It is expected that the ambiguity over the validity of Sedition Law (Section 124A) will get settled after the Supreme Court's Judgment.

What is Sedition?

Sedition was incorporated into the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1870. It is defined as any action that brings or attempts to bring contempt or hatred towards the Government of India. Sedition cases are punishable with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. It categorizes four sources of seditious acts: **(a)** Spoken words; **(b)** Written words;**(c)** Signs; **(d)** Visible representations.

It is classified as '**cognisable**' (No need of Court warrant to arrest the person) and a '**non-bailable**' and '**non-compoundable**' offence.

What has been the history of Sedition Law in India?

Sedition laws were first enacted in 17th century England. Later it was inserted into IPC in 1870. The section was introduced initially to deal with **increasing Wahabi activities** between 1863 and 1870. These activities posed a challenge to the colonial government.

Some of the most famous sedition trials of the late 19th and early 20th century involved Indian nationalist leaders. The first among them was the **trial of Jogendra Chandra Bose** in 1891. He was the editor of the newspaper, *Bangobasi*. He wrote an article criticizing the Age of Consent Bill for posing a threat to the religion and for its coercive relationship with Indians.

It was also used to prosecute **Bal Gangadhar Tilak** (for his writings in *Kesari*) in 1897. The other well-known case was **the sedition trial of Mahatma Gandhi** in 1922. Gandhi had called Sedition 'the prince among the political sections of the IPC designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen'.

What are the key judgements under the Sedition Law after Independence?

In 1951, the **Punjab High Court** had ruled Section 124A to be unconstitutional. A similar ruling was passed in 1959 by the Allahabad High Court, which also concluded that it struck at the very root of free speech.

Kedar Nath Singh v State of Bihar, 1962: The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of Section 124A (sedition) on the basis that this power was required by the state to protect itself. However, it said that every citizen has a right to say or write about the government by way of criticism or comment.

A citizen can criticize the government to the extent it **does not incite violence** against the government or with the intention of creating public disorder.

P. Alavi vs State of Kerala, 1982: The Supreme Court held that sloganeering, criticising Parliament or Judicial setup does not amount to sedition.

Balwant Singh v State of Punjab,1995: The Supreme Court acquitted persons from charges of sedition for shouting slogans such as 'Khalistan Zindabad'. The Court held that mere raising of slogans by two individuals alone cannot be said as sedition. Further, it is also not considered as an attempt aimed to excite hatred or disaffection against the government.

What are the arguments in favour of the Sedition Law?

First, Freedom of speech is **protected through Article 19 (1) but it is not absolute**. Sometimes speech is used as a tool to destabilise country's polity and to promote enmity in the society.

Second, It protects the elected government from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means. The continued existence of the government established by law is an essential condition of the **stability of the State.**

Third, Maoist insurgents and rebel groups openly advocate the overthrow of the government by revolution. Thus keeping section 124A is important for **national security**.

Fourth, if contempt of court invites penal action, contempt of government should also attract punishment.

What are the arguments against the Sedition Law?

First, the law has been **misused** with rising frequency by the Union and State Governments to muzzle free speech and dissent. This **undermines Article 19** of the Indian Constitution. The misuse is fuelled by **vague definitions of 'disaffection towards government'** and other provisions of the section.

The governments have invoked the section against activists, detractors, writers and even cartoonists seeking to silence political dissent by accusing dissenters of promoting disaffection. The recent reports show that the number of cases of sedition under Section 124A increased by 160%. On the other hand, the **rate of conviction dropped to 3.3% in 2019 from 33.3% in 2016**.

Read More: Misuse of Sedition law in India

Second, it creates **dissonance between its international commitments and domestic practice**. For instance, the section is at odds with the 'Open Societies' statement which is signed by India. It commits signatories to freedom of expression, both online and offline.

Third, there has been a **growing legal constituency for scrapping this law**. For instance, in February 2021, a Delhi court said the sedition law could not be invoked to quieten the disquiet under the pretence of muzzling miscreants. The Chief Justice of India has also raised questions about the need of a colonial-era law, that subjugated people, in Independent India.

Read More: Sedition law has no place in a modern democracy

Fourth, political leaders and security agencies have applied **an increasingly expansive interpretation** to the *Kedarnath versus State of Bihar* Judgment. This subjective interpretation has converted the section into a **political weapon to silence the opposition voices**.

Fifth, many experts believe that **provisions of IPC and Unlawful Activities Prevention Act are sufficient for protecting national integrity**. Thus there is no need for a separate provision on sedition law.

Sixth, Sedition does not take into consideration disaffection towards **(a)** the Constitution, **(b)** the Legislatures, and **(c)** Administration of justice, all of which would be as disastrous to the security of the State.

What lies ahead?

First, the Supreme Court directed that the matter be listed for final disposal on May 5 and underlined that there will be no adjournments. A conclusive decision can be expected on the validity of the section.

Second, the decision on sedition will open gates to review other acts like Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the National Security Act. Critics argue that these acts are being increasingly activated to silence critics of the State.

Third, if **the section is not scrapped**, then police personnel should be duly trained in application of the section. In this regard, **arrest shouldn't be made below the rank of a high level officer like the** Superintendent of Police. **Guidelines issued in the *Kedarnath* case** should be placed in every police station. Further, **Kedarnath Judgment should be inserted into Section 124A** by amending IPC.

Conclusion

Every irresponsible exercise of the right to free speech and expression cannot be termed seditious. While it is essential to protect national integrity, it should not be misused as a tool to curb free speech. Dissent and criticism are essential ingredients of a robust public debate on policy issues as part of a vibrant democracy. Therefore, every restriction on free speech and expression must be carefully scrutinized to avoid unwarranted restrictions.

Source: **Business Standard**, **Indian Express**, **New Indian Express**

Relevance of Nature for Human Health – Explained, pointwise

Introduction

Nature is all the animals, plants, and other things in the world that are not man-made. It also includes all the events and processes that are not caused by people. It plays a pivotal role in the overall development and wellbeing of an individual. It provides multiple resources to humans as well as help in managing their stress and anxiety levels. However nature is being destroyed and neglected by mankind for fulfilling their myopic desires. This warrants a proactive approach towards preservation and conservation of nature.

Why is the relevance of nature for Human health?

First, Harvard Medical School scientists find **spending time in nature lowers cortisol,** the stress-exacerbating hormone. Scientists researching the Japanese practice of **'*Shinrin-yoku*' or 'forest bathing'** found that walking through woods, looking, touching and smelling leaves results in 12.4% lower cortisol and a 5.8% lower heart rate.

Second, The USDA finds green spaces boosts **cognitive development in children** and childhood access to nature strengthens cognitive health in old age. Experts believe tha**t even a short walk in a park or viewing a tree outside** an office window has a measurable effect on our cognitive function. It improves our ability to concentrate, recall, process maths and put ideas together in a creative way.

UNEP finds **exposure to pollutants causes developmental delays** and lower IQs in children, exacerbating Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases in older people.

Third, the mere existence of nature around human beings helps them to **tackle emotional and psychological stress**. Spending time in nature, from a small park to a large reserve, lifts people out of the troubles that cause them to ruminate. In psychology, 'rumination' refers to repetitive negative and self-referential thoughts. The USDA estimates individuals **with just 10% green space** near their home **face a 25% greater risk of depression** and a 30% higher chance of anxiety disorders.

Fourth, it helps us understand the **evolutionary process** by studying different species found in nature. For instance, studying chimpanzees can help understand various aspects of human biology as both of them have 98% common genetic material.

Fifth, there are **many crucial functions that are performed by leaves** due to which they are called **building blocks of life**. They absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen that we need to breathe. They help settle dust which we would otherwise inhale, damaging our lungs. They **absorb the polluting and toxic gasses** released from vehicles and factories.

Many of them are **edible** — spinach leaves are nutritious, tender tamarind leaves give a tanginess to lentils and curry leaves add flavour to so many dishes.

We also use palm leaves to **thatch homes and many houses** have aloevera and tulsi leaves with medicinal properties — part of our in-house drugstore used to treat colds, coughs and skin ailments.

They become **fodder for sheep, goats and cows**, are used to make nests by birds, ants and squirrels, get nibbled on by caterpillars that become pollinating butterflies.

Why does nature have such a deep impact on Humans?

First, Like all species on Earth, human beings are also the children of nature and strongly connected to nature at every level.

Second, Our brains have been honed over millennia learning from nature — climbing trees, foraging for food, preserving water, building shelters. As nature taught us, we grew.

What are the factors enhancing separation of Nature from humans?

First, the desire to become developed is inducing every country to focus on **industrialization**. Greater number of factories emit large scale pollutants like Sulfur Dioxide, Carbon Monoxide etc. that results in air and water pollution.

Second, the **rapid urbanization** has resulted in large scale deforestation and concrete has replaced the tree canopy in cities. People in cities are suffering from much higher rates of mental illness, stress, depression and other challenges.

Third, the **digital revolution has enhanced access** to more screens and more electronic devices. This has reduced interaction of humans with the physical world and devoid them of multiple benefits arising out of such interaction.

Fourth, the **class inequality** also restricts access to nature and its services. It's easier for rich people and much harder for the poor to experience the green spaces.

What steps have been taken for preservation of nature?

Domestic

Nagar Van Udhyan Yojana: It aims to increase forest cover in urban areas by developing 200 Urban Forests across the country in the next five years.

Various Acts: Wildlife Protection Act (1972), Environment Protection Act (1986), Biological Diversity Act (2002) and others play a pivotal role in nature conservation.

National Green India Mission: It is one of the eight missions launched under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). It aims to increase green cover in India to the extent of five million hectares (mha) and improve the quality of existing green cover on another 5 mha.

International

The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Inter-American Development Bank(IADB) have **pledged to mainstream nature into all their policies**, analyses and investments in human development by 2025.

The ADB and IADB have established **a Natural Capital Lab,** formally recognising nature as an asset and acknowledging the high costs of overlooking this.

UN Sustainable Development Goals: These goals induce countries to work in such a way that development takes place without damaging the environment and without compromising the needs of future generations.

UN Convention to Combat Desertification: It was established in 1994 and is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development to sustainable land management.

The Convention addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the dryland, where some of the most vulnerable ecosystems and peoples can be found

What more can be done?

First, there is a need to understand the enormous contribution of nature to human wellbeing and bring this into **policy, planning and financial investment**.

Second, human well-being involves **reconnecting with natural experiences**. Government can **collaborate with NGOs like GreenPeace** to spread awareness about nature interaction. Masses can be encouraged to adopt simple practices like just hearing birdsong at dawn that can have a very deep effect on people.

Third, there should be **greater research using state of art technology** in order to find out the impact of nature on human beings. For instance, we can use accelerometery or consumer wearables which give us granular, minute-level data of whether people become more vigorous in green spaces than built-up ones.

Fourth, there **should be equitable access to nature** for every human being. Countries can use innovative concepts like the **'3-30-300' strategy.** Under this every home should have a view of three trees, every neighborhood should have thirty percent canopy cover and three hundred meters distance to the nearest green space.

Fifth, the **teachers should encourage students** to create an effective bond with nature using many fun activities. This includes Painting on leaves and stringing them together to make colorful decorations, making toys from leaves, like a whistle or a doll from coconut leaves etc..

Conclusion

Humans can and must rebuild their bond with nature. They must understand that a stable natural ecosystem is a sine qua non for long term survival of planet earth. Further, any future discourse must be guided keeping in mind the saying of Mahatma Gandhi – **'There is enough for everyone's need but not for anyone's greed'.**

Source: The Times of India, The Times of India, The Times of India