Mains Marathon

Compilation

30th Oct, to 4th Nov, 2023

Index

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Evaluate the effectiveness of merging the Railways budget with the main budget. Has it led to better capital expenditure?

Introduction: Give brief context to the merger of Rail budget
Body: How effective has been the merger?
Conclusion: Way forward

The government of India decided to merge the Rail Budget with the Union Budget from the budget year 2017-18 based on the recommendations of the Committee headed by Shri Bibek Debroy. The practice of a separate budget for railways was started in 1924 based on the recommendations of the Acworth Committee. The merger aimed to simplify the budgetary process and improve financial management.
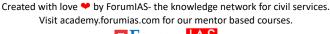
How effectiveness has been the merger?

- **Focus on modernization**: The goal of the merger was to provide funding for the railway network's long-overdue upgrade and safety enhancements. Along with this merger, there is a need to address various factors, including government priorities, bureaucratic hurdles, and operational efficiency to modernize our railway infrastructure.
- **Transparency and accountability**: Combining the budgets made it simpler to monitor the use of railway funding and was viewed as a step toward increased accountability and transparency.
- **Budgetary process simplification**: Combining the budgets made handling several budgets less difficult and streamlined the budgetary process overall. It made it unnecessary for the Railways to give the government dividend payments in exchange for budgetary support, freeing up money for capital expenditures.
- **Allocation of Resources**: The merger allowed the government to allocate resources based on priorities rather than allocating funds to the railways separately. This flexibility in resource allocation can be advantageous.

Has it led to better capital expenditure?

- **Revamp operations**: Capital expenditures for the Indian Railways increased by 14% to ₹2.45 trillion for 2022–2023 from ₹2.15 trillion in the previous fiscal year. The appropriate decision was made to combine the rail and general budget, and as a result, average annual investments, which previously stood at ₹40,000–45,000 crore, have increased to ₹90,000 crore which helps in the modernization of railways.
- **Increased Focus on Capital Expenditure**: The merger was expected to enhance the focus on capital expenditure in the railways by eliminating the need for the payment of a dividend to the government. It was anticipated that more resources would be available for modernization and infrastructure development.
- **Balance between freight and passengers**: Despite the merger the passenger segment has faced losses in comparison to the freight segment which is profitable despite annual growth in freight volume and revenue of the railways in the period April-July 2023 at 1% and 3%. Indian railways' share in freight business has steadily decreased to approx. 27% from upwards of 80% at the time of independence.

Conclusion

The merger of the Railways budget with the main budget in India was a significant reform aimed at simplifying the budgetary process and potentially improving capital expenditure in the railway

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sector. However, the effectiveness of this reform. depends on factors like efficient allocation of resources, transparency in financial management, and the government's priorities.

Critically analyze the role of the Speaker in the Indian legislative system. Should the Speaker's powers be limited?

Introduction: Brief introduction about speaker.
Body: Highlight role of speaker and if his powers should be limited or not?
Conclusion: Way forward

India is a parliamentary democracy, with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha presiding over legislative proceedings. In the Indian legislative system, the Speaker has a vital and complex role. In both state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, the Speaker acts as the presiding officer.

Role of Speaker in the Indian Legislative System

- **Impartiality**: The Speaker should respect democratic values and act impartially. They are not allowed to cast votes or take part in debates unless there is a tie. But in reality, Speakers frequently represent the governing party, which can cast doubt on their objectivity.
- **Order and decorum**: The legislature cannot operate effectively unless the Speaker plays a key role in upholding order during debates and making sure that the norms of procedure are respected. They have the authority to punish members who cause disruptions to meetings.
- **Making Decisions**: The Speaker may set the order in which legislation and motions are discussed and may also choose which members may speak at a debate. They can influence the legislative agenda because of their power.
- **Casting Vote**: The Speaker holds the casting vote in the event of a tie, which may be a huge source of influence, particularly in closely divided houses.
- **Representation**: The Speaker gives the President or Governor the House's opinion. This serves a significant ceremonial and constitutional purpose.

Arguments against limiting the speaker's powers

- **Constitutional Role**: The Speaker of India is endowed with particular powers under the Indian Constitution, and any attempt to curtail these powers would necessitate amending the Constitution. Maintaining the division of powers as envisioned by the Constitution is crucial.
- **Experience and Knowledge**: The Speaker's profound knowledge of parliamentary customs and procedures is essential to the House's efficient operation.
- **Accountability:** The Speaker is accountable to the House, and members can move a motion of no confidence if they believe the Speaker is acting in a biased or partisan manner. This accountability mechanism can mitigate concerns about misuse of power.

Arguments for Limiting the Speaker's Powers

- **Partisanship:** There may be questions regarding the Speaker's impartiality because they frequently belong to the ruling party. To maintain justice, there have been proposals for a neutral Speaker to be selected from outside the ranks of elected members.

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- **Abuse of Power:** The Speaker's authority to choose the legislative agenda and to grant members a chance to speak may be abused for political ends. Decisions that are biased in favour of the ruling party may result from this.
- **Impact on Committees:** The Speaker has the authority to designate people to serve on several parliamentary committees. This influence may weaken the system of checks and balances by affecting the government's supervision and examination.

Conclusion

The Speaker is considered the true guardian of the Indian Parliamentary democracy, holding the complete authority of the Lok Sabha. Thus, the impartiality of the office is very important to make parliamentary democracy work in the true sense.

Evaluate the socio-economic implications of expanding human settlements into flood-prone zones. Discuss the role of governance in mitigating the risks associated with these settlements.

Introduction: Give brief context to the question
Body: Highlight socio economic implications of expanding human settlements in flood prone areas
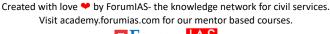**Conclusion:** Way forward

According to a study led by the World Bank and published in Nature India's urban areas have been flooding more and more often, destroying lives and livelihoods. According to studies, expanding human settlements in flood-prone areas poses a significant threat to urban and semi-urban areas in India.

Socio-economic implications of such settlements

- **Enhanced Vulnerability**: Communities located in locations prone to flooding are more vulnerable to floods, which can result in fatalities, property destruction, and forced relocation. This makes the impacted communities more vulnerable.
- **Migration and Displacement**: People who experience frequent flooding may be compelled to leave their houses, which may result in internal displacement. This could occasionally lead to migration into cities, which would strain existing crowded cities.
- **Impact on Agriculture**: Fertile soil is frequently found in flood-prone areas, and for many people in India, agriculture is a major source of income. Crop destruction brought on by flooding can affect income and food security.
- **Infrastructure Damage**: Severe damage can occur to infrastructure, including utilities, roads, and bridges, which would interfere with networks for communication and transportation.
- **Health Risks**: Waterborne illnesses can result from floods contaminating water supplies. Floods may overwhelm the infrastructure and services provided by the health system, affecting public health.

What role does governance play in mitigating such risks

- **Land use planning and zoning**: Strict zoning laws that prohibit or restrict development in regions vulnerable to flooding are essential to good governance. These rules must be strictly enforced.

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- **Early Warning Systems**: To give communities at risk timely information that allows them to evacuate and make the appropriate preparations, governments should invest in early warning systems.
- **Risk Reduction Measures**: Implementing flood control measures such as embankments, levees, and drainage systems can mitigate the risk associated with living in flood-prone areas.
- **Insurance and Compensation**: Encourage and facilitate the purchase of flood insurance, as well as provide compensation to affected individuals and communities.
- **Community Awareness and Education**: Governance should focus on raising awareness among communities about flood risks and teaching them how to respond effectively.

Conclusion

Scientific mapping of flood-prone areas with the strengthening of local urban governments can help provide effective governance to mitigate these risks. Additionally, long-term climate change adaptation strategies should be considered to address evolving flood risks.

Critically assess N.R. Narayana Murthy's suggestion of a 70-hour work week for young Indians. What are the potential drawbacks?

Introduction: Give context to the question
Body: Evaluation of 70-hour work week
Conclusion: Way forward

N.R. Narayana Murthy, the founder of Infosys, recently stated that young Indians need to put in 70 hours a week at work drawing reactions from both sides with some praising the advice while some criticizing the advice as being exploitative and unhealthy.

Potential benefits of 70-hour work week

- **Increased Productivity**: Advocates argue that a longer workweek could potentially result in higher productivity due to more time spent on tasks and projects.
- **Economic Growth**: It might boost economic growth as more work hours could contribute to increased production and innovation.
- **Global Competition**: In a globalized world, longer work hours might help Indian professionals remain competitive in the international job market.

Drawbacks of 70-hour work week

- **Burnout and Mental Health**: Workers who put in 70 hours a week are more prone to experience burnout, higher levels of stress, and mental health problems. Extended work hours may negatively impact an individual's health and work-life equilibrium.
- **Effect on Family Life**: Long work hours can make it more difficult to meet personal and family obligations, strain relationships within the family, and disturb the work-life balance.
- **Diminished Creativity and Innovation**: Overworked People frequently exhibit less creativity and innovation. Tiredness can hinder one's capacity for original thought and problem-solving.
- **Work Quality**: Longer hours do not always translate into better work. Tired employees are more prone to make mistakes and do subpar work.

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- **Discouragement of Skill Development**: A seventy-hour workweek may not provide time for learning, developing new skills, or following other hobbies, which could impede one's ability to advance both personally and professionally.
- **Gender Inequality**: Extended work hours may have a disproportionate impact on women, who often shoulder greater caring and home obligations, hence exacerbating gender disparities.
- **Danger of Exploitation**: Employers may take advantage of a culture of extended work hours, which could result in unpaid overtime, subpar working conditions, and abuses of workers' rights.
- **Impact on the Community and Society**: Long work hours can reduce participation in the community and society, which can have an impact on volunteer work and social cohesiveness.
- **Demotivation and Job discontent**: Excessive workloads can result in low morale, significant employee turnover, and job discontent, all of which can be detrimental to businesses.

Conclusion

Finally, while N.R. Narayana Murthy's proposal for a 70-hour workweek for young Indians aims to increase productivity, it should be carefully evaluated in light of the potential negative effects on work quality, burnout, mental health problems, and work-life balance. Writing good employment rules requires striking a balance between the needs of the job and the welfare and personal development of the employee.

Critically evaluate the financial dependency of local governments in India on their respective State governments. Suggest measures to improve their financial autonomy.

Introduction: Give brief description of local governments in India
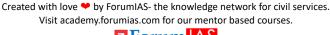**Body:** Evaluate financial dependency of local governments and measures to improve financial autonomy
Conclusion: Way forward

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts created the new Local Governance Framework in India, which became operational in April 1993. The Acts focused on enabling democratic decentralization, that devolved a range of powers and responsibilities to local elected bodies and made them accountable to the people for their implementation. The financial dependency of local governments on their respective State governments in India has been a matter of concern for many years.

Evaluation of financial dependency of local government

- **Lack of Fiscal Decentralization**: Fiscal decentralization is the key to local financial autonomy. In India, State governments control most of the revenue sources and budgetary decisions, leaving local bodies with little discretion over their finances. This limits their ability to prioritize and finance local projects effectively.
- **Unequal Resource Distribution**: Budgets from State governments are frequently distributed arbitrarily and unequally to local organizations. The allocation of resources may become uneven as a result of political factors taking precedence over the true needs of local populations.

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- **Administrative inefficiencies**: A lot of municipal organizations lack the resources and know-how necessary to effectively collect taxes. Low revenue collection as a result leads to reliance on state transfers.
- **Lack of Accountability**: The lack of financial autonomy can lead to a lack of accountability, as local governments may not feel responsible for their financial decisions when most of their funding comes from the State. This can hinder effective governance and service delivery.

Measures to improve financial autonomy

- **Devolution of Financial Powers**: To give local organizations the autonomy to independently collect and handle taxes, state governments ought to grant them greater financial authority. This covers user fees, municipal taxes, and property taxes.
- **Capacity Building**: To enhance revenue collection and financial management, local governments should make investments in capacity building. This entails supplying the required equipment and technology, as well as training local officials.
- **Strengthen Local Governance**: Strengthen local governance by promoting the participation of local communities in decision-making processes. Empower local governments to make decisions that align with local needs and priorities.
- **Encourage Economic Development**: Local governments should be encouraged to promote economic development within their jurisdictions. This can help them generate additional revenue through increased economic activities and investments.

Conclusion

The provisions of the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments should be implemented in true spirit like the formation of State Finance Commissions regularly after 5 years like the Union Finance Commission. The governments should make adequate efforts to devolve funds, functions, and functionaries to local bodies so that they can effectively plan economic development and social justice schemes.

Analyze the role of the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee in maintaining the ethical conduct of MPs. Do you think the term 'unethical conduct' needs to be defined? Justify your answer.
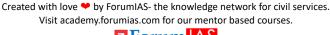
Introduction: What is ethics committee?
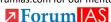**Body:** Role of ethics committee in maintaining ethical conduct of MPs
Conclusion: Way forward

The Ethics Committee of the Lok Sabha was set up in 2000, with a mandate to examine every complaint that is related to the unethical conduct of MPs & and recommend action thereafter. It is also tasked with formulating a code of conduct for MPs. The members of the Ethics Committee are appointed by the Speaker for one year.

Role of Ethics Committee in maintaining ethical conduct of MPs

- **Investigation and Decision-Making**: The committee is in charge of looking into complaints or claims that Members of Parliament have acted unethically. It looks into these complaints and makes inquiries to hold MPs responsible for their deeds.

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- **Advice and Guidance**: The committee can also help Members of Parliament understand and abide by the code of conduct required of them as elected officials by offering them advice and guidance on ethical issues.
- **Suggestions**: In cases where unethical conduct is established, the committee can recommend appropriate action or sanctions against the erring MPs, including suspension or expulsion from the Lok Sabha.
- **Education and Awareness**: The committee can use a variety of techniques, such as seminars and workshops, to increase MPs' understanding of moral principles and encourage moral behaviour.

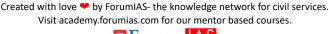**Arguments in favour of defining 'unethical conduct'**

- **Clarity and Consistency**: MPs would have a better idea of what is expected of them if there was a comprehensive and explicit definition of unethical conduct. This may result in the ethical standards being upheld more consistently.
- **Avoid Ambiguity**: Clearly defining unethical behaviour helps avoid confusion and varying opinions about what ethical behaviour is. This can help to avoid arguments and guarantee that each Member of Parliament is held to the same standards.
- **Transparency**: A precise definition improves transparency in the evaluation of ethical conduct, making it simpler for the general public and MPs to determine whether a given action falls under the category of unethical behaviour.

Arguments against defining 'unethical conduct'

- **Flexibility:** Ethical standards can evolve, and a rigid definition may limit the ability to adapt to changing norms and expectations.
- **Subjectivity**: What is considered unethical can vary based on cultural, societal, and individual perspectives. A detailed definition might still leave room for interpretation and disagreement.
- **Complexity**: Trying to list every possible unethical behaviour in a definition could lead to a cumbersome document.

Conclusion

The committee's role in interpreting and applying ethical standards, while taking into account the evolving nature of ethics, is crucial to maintaining the integrity of parliamentary proceedings and the conduct of MPs.

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Analyze the challenges of horizontal sharing of the divisible tax pool in India, with a focus on the emerging economic divide between the northern and southern states. How can the principles of equity and efficiency be balanced in this context?

Introduction: What is tax devolution?
Body: Highlight challenges arising from horizontal sharing of tax pool between northern and southern states.
Conclusion: Way forward

Tax devolution is the process by which tax revenues are allocated between the union government and the state governments. It is a system set up by the Constitution to fairly and equally divide the revenue from specific taxes between the Union and the states. In India, the horizontal distribution of the divisible revenue pool presents several difficult and divisive issues, particularly in light of the growing economic gap between the northern and southern states.
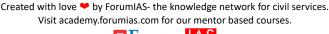
Some of these challenges are

- **Political Factors**: Due to their large population, northern states have a political sway that might lead to an unequal distribution of resources. Southern states with comparatively lower populations and stronger fiscal restraint may view this as unfair.
- **Historical reasons**: Economic disparities have been caused by historical reasons such as differences in state policy and economic development. States that have made long-term investments in infrastructure, healthcare, and education typically do better than others.
- **Regional Economic Disparities**: Southern states like Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu have higher per capita income and better human development indicators compared to northern states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. This economic divide makes it difficult to achieve equity in the distribution of resources.
- **Fiscal Imbalances**: Northern states often receive a larger share of central funds due to factors like population and poverty levels, which can create fiscal imbalances. However, this may not always align with their actual fiscal needs or economic potential, contributing to inefficiency in resource allocation.

Balancing Equity and Efficiency

- **Needs-Based Allocation**: A needs-based formula that considers the unique developmental requirements of every state, including population, poverty levels, gaps in infrastructure, and social indicators, can be developed. This would guarantee a more fair allocation of resources.
- **Performance-Based Incentives**: To encourage states to strengthen their budgetary restraint and allocate funds for human development, implement performance-based incentives. States may receive more funding if they demonstrate advancements in infrastructure, healthcare, and education.
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability**: Encouraging states to take actions that strengthen their budgets, such as cutting back on unnecessary spending and debt loads, to promote fiscal responsibility and accountability.
- **Cooperation among states**: Encourage interstate collaboration on regional development initiatives to alleviate inequities. This can involve working together on infrastructure and industrial development projects as well as exchanging best practices.

Conclusion

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To establish a just and efficient fiscal transfer system that promotes economic growth and lessens regional disparities, India must carefully consider how to strike a balance between efficiency and justice in the horizontal sharing of the divisible tax pool.

Evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives like 'plastic checkpoints' in biosphere reserves. How can such innovative local solutions be integrated into national policies to combat the issue of plastic pollution?

Introduction: Give context to the question
Body: How effective is 'plastic checkpoint' initiative and how can it be integrated into national programs.
Conclusion: Way forward

The Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve Trust has established the idea of "plastic checkpoints," which was recently acknowledged with the UNESCO Michel Batisse Award for Biosphere Reserve Management 2023. Residents of the community inspect all cars and visitors for plastic waste, which is gathered, repurposed, and used to build roadways.
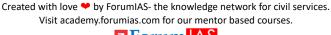
Effectiveness of such initiatives

- **Local Involvement**: By bringing attention to the issue of plastic waste, these programs frequently include local communities. They motivate individuals to take an active role in gathering and disposing of plastic debris. This local effort may result in less plastic pollution and less of an adverse effect on the environment.
- **Micro-Level Impact**: Within the particular biosphere reserve where they are installed, "plastic checkpoints" can significantly reduce plastic pollution on a micro level. They can support the preservation of regional animals, habitats, and waterways.
- **Educational Value**: These programs act as teaching instruments, informing the public about the dangers of plastic pollution and the significance of proper garbage disposal. They have the power to alter people's conduct by instilling a sense of accountability.

Integration into National Policies

- **Data Collection**: Promote the establishment of "plastic checkpoints" to keep track of the kinds and quantities of plastic waste that is gathered. National officials may find this data useful in understanding regional differences in plastic pollution and developing evidence-driven strategies.
- **Standardization**: Create national guidelines for recycling, garbage segregation, and collection. By adhering to these criteria, local programs such as "plastic checkpoints" can be made to adhere to best practices and complement the larger national waste management framework.
- **Motivations**: Create regulations that encourage corporations, organizations, and local communities to take an active role in managing plastic garbage. This can take the form of cash rewards, tax exemptions, or praise for exceptional work.
- **Education and Awareness**: Educational initiatives on waste management and plastic pollution should be a part of national strategies. These campaigns can use neighbourhood projects such as "plastic checkpoints" as models for effective community involvement.

Conclusion

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Locally, programs like "plastic checkpoints" in biosphere reserves can be beneficial because they include the community and cut down on plastic pollution. A concerted effort involving data collecting, standardization, incentives, education, legislation, and international collaboration is needed to incorporate these projects into national policies. By doing this, local communities' creativity and commitment to combating plastic pollution can be incorporated into national programs.

Analyze the role of self-regulation among digital platforms in India. Discuss the challenges and opportunities associated with self-regulation.

Introduction: Why self-regulation is essential?
Body: Role of self-regulation among digital platforms and challenges and opportunities associated with it.
Conclusion: Way forward

In India, digital platform self-regulation is essential for promoting morality and responsibility, controlling content, and keeping users' online safety.

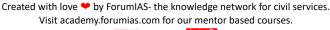**Role of self-regulation among digital platforms in India**

- **Content moderation**: To prevent harmful and unlawful content, like as hate speech, fake news, and explicit material, from appearing on Indian digital platforms, self-regulation is required. They must establish a secure environment for users, particularly young people and others who are more vulnerable.
- **Privacy and Data Protection**: Platforms can set rules for consent, transparency, and data protection with the use of self-regulation. They have to protect user data and follow data privacy rules.
- **Compliance with Local Laws**: The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, among other laws and regulations, are obeyed by platforms that practice self-regulation. Platforms must abide by these guidelines to stay out of legal hot water.
- **User Experience:** Reducing cybercrime, harassment, and bullying online is another way that self-regulation helps to preserve a great user experience. Increased user trust and engagement may result from this.

Challenges with self-regulation

- **Accountability**: Users bear the responsibility for reporting and flagging objectionable content since platforms may not always accept accountability for the content they contain. A gap in responsibility may result from this.
- **Issues with Censorship**: When platforms are under pressure to remove or restrict content that governments or interest groups deem undesirable, self-regulation can be viewed as a kind of censorship. It might be difficult to strike a balance between responsible content filtering and free speech.

Opportunities with self-regulation

- **Flexibility**: Self-regulation enables platforms to change with the times and respond to new risks and the evolving digital communication environment. It can assist platforms in staying ahead of changing difficulties.

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- **Innovation**: Free from the shackles of strict government restrictions, platforms can innovate in content moderation methods, data security, and user experience. This encourages flexibility and inventiveness.
- **User Empowerment**: By offering users the means to report and manage their online experiences, self-regulation can empower users and give them a say in what constitutes appropriate content.

Conclusion

In India, digital platforms' self-regulation is essential to preserving a responsible and secure online environment. Finding a balance in India's dynamic digital world between government control and self-regulation is still a major concern.

Critically analyze the report by UNFPA on India's population dynamics. Suggest policy measures to address the challenges posed by demographic changes.

Introduction: Brief description of the report.
Body: Evaluate its suggestions and suggest policy measures to address the challenges.
Conclusion: Way forward

The India Ageing Report 2023, released by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) India and the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), highlights the country's rapidly aging population.

Evaluation of the report

- **High Life expectancy of women**: The report highlights that women have a higher life expectancy at ages 60 and 80 compared to men, with variations across states and territories. For eg, women in Kerala & Himachal Pradesh have a higher life expectancy than women in other states.
- **Regional variations:** The number of elderly people and their growth rates vary significantly amongst States with the elder population share greater in most southern states and a few northern states like Himachal Pradesh and Punjab than in the national average.
- **Low Knowledge of Social Security Programmes:** In India, the aged are not well-informed about the different social security programs that are available to them. A little over half of the elderly (55%) know about the Annapurna system, 44% about the widow pension system (IGNWPS), and 12% about the old-age pension program (IGNOAPS).
- **Poverty:** Older women are more likely to be widowed, live alone, have no income, possess fewer assets, and be completely dependent on their families for support, all of which negatively impact their quality of life and use of healthcare. As a result, poverty in old age is essentially gendered.

Policy measures that can address these challenges

- **Social Security and Old-Age Support:** Create extensive pension and social security programs to be ready for the aging population. Promote retirement savings and investments and bring all Old Age Homes under regulatory purview.
- **Data collection and research:** To help with informed policymaking, address the absence of reliable data on a variety of topics about the elderly by incorporating pertinent questions in data collection exercises like the National Sample Survey, the National Family Health Survey, and the Census of India.

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- **Women empowerment:** The goal is to encourage women who have entered the professional workforce to have children through a mix of reproductive freedom, quality healthcare, work-life balance, adequate childcare, maternity leave, and teaching male partners about sharing household tasks to reverse the trend of declining fertility rates in developing nations.
- **Better care of old people:** The need is to emphasize the importance of elderly people living in multigenerational households & framing policies that facilitate and support this living arrangement. Short-term facilities like creches or day-care facilities can help elderly people receive better care when living with their respective families.

Conclusion

According to the report, India will have 347 million older people overall by 2050, when their percentage will have doubled to 20.8%. This unprecedented rise in the aging population will have significant implications for health, economy, and society in India. The need is to address these challenges and involve various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, and international organizations, in the development and implementation of policies to ensure their effectiveness.

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