

Forum IAS

7 PM COMPILATION

16th to 31st January, 2024

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
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Significance and Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India- Explained Pointwise

Significance and Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India, The recent **Karuvannur Cooperative Bank** scam has again brought to the fore the **governance issues** in the functioning of Cooperative Banks in India. **PMC Bank**, **Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank** and **Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank** have also failed in recent times. In this article, we will delve deep into the governance issues plaguing the cooperative banks in India.



The recent **Karuvannur Cooperative Bank scam** has again brought to the fore the **governance issues** in the functioning of Cooperative Banks in India. **PMC Bank**, **Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank** and **Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank** have also failed in recent times.

Cooperative Banks

- » **Cooperative Banks**- Financial institutions operating on a cooperative basis where customers are also the owners of the bank. Works on 'No profit, No loss' and 'One person, One vote' principle
- » **Types of cooperative Banks**-
 - a. Urban cooperative Bank- **Single state UCB** and **Multistate UCB**.
 - b. Rural Cooperative Bank- **Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** at Village level, **District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs)** & **State Cooperative Banks (StCBs)**
- » **Dual Control**- Banking functions- **RBI** and Management function- **State/Central Registrar of cooperatives**

Challenges

- » **Board members as borrowers**- Siphoning of funds by misuse of power like **PMC bank failure**
- » **Political Connivance**- Leading to scams, corruption and money laundering.
- » **Financial Vulnerabilities**- High levels of **NPAs**, low **Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR)**.
- » **Competition**- UCBs face competition from **MFIs**, **NBFCs** and **FinTech** companies.
- » **Dual control**- **RBI (Banking)** & state registrars(Management)
- » **Infrastructural Challenges**- **Sub-standard softwares** and **booking keeping systems**

Significance

- » **Extension of Credit**- To Agriculture and Rural Sectors by **PACS**, **DCCBs** and **StCBs**.
- » **Spurring local MSME and SHG growth**- **Lijjat papad funding by cooperative banks**.
- » **Democratic Ownership and Control**- Greater Political empowerment in areas with strong cooperatives like **Maharashtra**, **Kerala** and **Gujarat**.
- » **Customer-Centric Approach**- Personalized loan products like **customized savings products** and **affordable housing loans**.
- » **Community Development**- Local infrastructure projects, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs. For ex- **Sikkim Development due to UCBs**

Way Forward

- » **Strict Regulatory Action by RBI**- Regular **delicensing** and **amalgamation of loss making** cooperative banks.
- » **Cooperative Federation**- To conduct **regular comprehensive audits** of the cooperative banks.
- » **Upgradation of infrastructure**- Common and standardized **software & bookkeeping systems**.
- » **Implement N.S. Vishwanathan Committee Recommendations**- **Four tier classification**, formation of **board-level Committees**, professional **board of management & fixed tenure** of board members.

What are Cooperative Banks? What is The Structure of Cooperative Banks in India?

Cooperative Banks- Cooperative banks in India are **financial institutions** that operate on a cooperative basis, where the **customers are also the owners of the bank**. Cooperative banks operate on the principle of '**no profit, no loss**' and '**one person, one vote**'. According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), India had 1,502 urban co-operative banks as of March 2023.

Structure of Cooperative Banks in India

Cooperative Banks In India			
Urban Cooperative Banks		Rural Cooperative Banks	
Scheduled	Non-Scheduled	Short Term	Long Term
1. UCBs Operating in a single state a. Registered- State Cooperative Societies Act. b. Dual Control Banking functions- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949 (BRA 1949). Management functions- State registrar of Cooperative societies		1. Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)- Village level- Not under RBI. No BRA 1949 applies. 2. Central Cooperative Banks (CCBs)- District level & State Cooperative Banks (StCBs)-State level a. Registered- State Cooperative Societies Act b. Dual Control Banking functions- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949. Inspection function has been delegated to NABARD by RBI under BRA 1949. Management function- State registrar of Cooperative societies	1. Primary cooperative agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs) 2. State Cooperative agriculture and Rural Development Banks (SCARDBs)
2. Multistate UCBs a. Registered- Multi State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002. b. Dual Control Banking functions- RBI under Banking Regulation Act 1949. Management functions- Central Registrar of Cooperative societies.			

Importance of Cooperative Banks?

- 1. Extension of Credit to Agriculture and Rural Sectors-** **PACS**, District Central Cooperative Banks (**DCCBs**) and State Cooperative Banks (**SCBs**) play a vital role in providing **credit to farmers** and supporting agricultural activities. They contribute significantly to the development of the rural economy.
- 2. Spurring local MSME and SHG growth-** Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) cater to the financial needs of small and medium-sized businesses and individuals in urban and semi-urban areas. **For Ex- Lijjat papad funding by cooperative banks.**
- 3. Ownership and Control-** Members of a credit cooperative society **collectively decide on policies** and **elect the board of directors**. This results in **democratic ownership** and control. **For Ex-** Greater Political empowerment in areas with strong cooperatives like **Maharashtra, Kerala** and **Gujarat**.
- 4. Customer-Centric Approach-** Cooperative banks prioritize the needs of their members rather than maximizing profits. **For ex- Personalized loan products** like **customized savings products, affordable housing loans** tailored to the specific needs of their members.
- 5. Community Development-** Cooperative banks support **local infrastructure projects, educational initiatives, or healthcare programs**. This involvement strengthens the socio-economic fabric of the community. **For ex- Role of Cooperative Banks in development of Sikkim.**
- 6. Risk Mitigation-** Cooperative banks are **slightly more resilient to economic downturns** as they are **not exposed to high-risk and high-value assets in comparison to commercial banks.** **For Ex- Resilience shown by UCBs during Global Financial Crisis 2008.**

What are The Challenges of Cooperative Banks in India?

- 1. Financial Scams-** Large number of big Cooperative banks have failed due to financial scams. **For Ex- PMC Bank, Guru Raghavendra Cooperative Bank and Maharashtra State Cooperative (MSC) Bank** have failed due to financial frauds.
- 2. Board members as borrowers-** Cooperative bank board members can borrow from the banks, unlike the commercial bank board members. The board members in several cases have misused their borrowing powers to siphon off large sums of money, resulting in major cooperative bank failures. **For Ex- PMC Bank Failure due to misuse of power by board.**
- 3. Political Connivance and corruption-** The board of the cooperative banks are dominated by the local politicians, who connive with local private financiers and real estate players to issue illegal loans and aid their **black money transactions.**
- 4. Financial Vulnerabilities-** Cooperative Banks face financial vulnerabilities such as **low capitalization, high levels of NPAs, low Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR).**
- 5. Challenges posed by other financial sector companies-** Changes in the financial sector and evolution of **Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), FinTech companies, Payment gateways, Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)** have posed challenges to the Cooperative bank growth in terms of deposit and lending capabilities.
- 6. Regulatory Challenges-** The dual control of cooperative banks- **RBI in banking functions and the state government in management functions,** has created regulatory ambiguities and uncertainties, in proper monitoring of cooperative banks.
- 7. Improper audit mechanism-** Audits conducted by state department officials are **irregular and lack comprehensiveness.**
- 8. Infrastructural Challenges-** The cooperative banks face logistical challenges like **sub-standard softwares and sub-standard booking keeping systems,** which has made these banks susceptible to frauds.
- 7. Governance Challenges-** The **small size, scattered nature and the lack of a unified brand and policy** for cooperative banks makes it difficult for the watchdogs to effectively govern these banks.

Read More- [Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative \(PMC\) Bank crisis](#)

What should Be The Way forward?

- 1. Strict Regulatory Action by RBI-** RBI must be stringent in its regulatory oversight by focussing on **regular delicensing** and the **shrinkage or compulsory amalgamation** of loss making cooperative banks.
- 2. Cooperative Federation-** A cooperative federation must be formed to conduct **regular comprehensive audits** of the cooperative banks.
- 3. Upgradation of infrastructure-** The provisions must be made for a **common, standardized software, standardized bookkeeping systems.** These must be linked to a **central database** for proper financial monitoring using **artificial intelligence and pattern recognition.**
- 4. Remove political influence-** There is a need to bring in **new people, young people and professionals in managerial roles,** who will take cooperative banks forward.
- 5. Implement the recommendations of N.S. Vishwanathan Committee-** **Four tier classification** (Tier 1 (having deposits up to Rs 100 crore), Tier 2 (deposits between Rs 100 crore and Rs 1,000 crore), Tier 3 (deposits between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 10,000 crore), Tier 4 (deposits more than Rs 10,000 crore)), **formation**

of board-level Committees, constitution of professional board of management and fixed tenure of board members recommended by the committee must be implemented at the earliest.

6. Implement recommendation of R Gandhi Committee- Conversion of Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) with business size of 20,000 crore rupees or more into regular banks.

Read More- [Livemint](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Banking sector (Indian Economy)

150 years of IMD- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

Recently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) celebrated its **150th year of establishment and service to the nation**. On this occasion IMD launched several initiatives such as **Weather Analysis and Forecast Enabling System (WAFES)**, **Panchayat Mausam Seva Portal for farmers**, **National Framework of Climate Services (NFCS)**. The Indian Meteorological Department has played a very substantial role over the years in terms of Weather forecasting and monsoon prediction. However, IMD also faces several challenges, especially in the wake of climate crisis that we face today.



150 years of IMD- Significance and Challenges

Recently, the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** celebrated its **150th year** of establishment and service to the nation. IMD has played a very **substantial role** over the years in terms of Weather forecasting and monsoon prediction. However, IMD also faces **several challenges**, especially in the wake of climate crisis that we face today.

IMD

- » India Meteorological Department(IMD) was established in **1875** with its headquarter **located in New Delhi**.
- » It is an **agency of the Ministry of Earth Sciences** of the GOI. It was formed in the backdrop of **Kolkata and Andhra Cyclones 1864** which killed more than one lakh people.
- » **Objective and Functions of IMD-**
 - Meteorological Observation and Statistics
 - Disaster Management
 - Seismological Work
 - Naming of Cyclones
 - Conduct Research and Development

Challenges

- » **Accurate Monsoon Prediction-** IMD has only **199 District Ago-Meteorological Units** out of the targeted **660**.
- » **Data Assimilation and Modelling-** Failure of accuracy by IMD during the **2015 Chennai Floods**.
- » **Outdated observational infrastructure-** Failure of early warning systems in disseminating information about the **2013 Uttarakhand floods**.
- » **Localized Weather and Climate Change Impacts-** **Urban heat island effect** in cities like Delhi pose challenge to IMD's accurate temperature predictions
- » **Lack of human resource capacity-** IMD's challenge in dealing with emerging technologies such as **ensemble forecasting**.

Significant Achievements

- » **Monsoon prediction- Meghdoot app** designed by IMD to provide agro-meteorological services
- » **Weather Forecasting- Winter Fog Experiment (WIFEX)** developed by IMD has helped in the dissemination of fog information
- » **Disaster Management-** IMD's accurate prediction of **2020 Cyclone Amphan, 2013 Cyclone Phailin** allowed for timely evacuations and protected several lives
- » **Air Quality Monitoring-** IMD's **SAFAR system** to monitor air pollution level in Delhi
- » **Climate Change Research-** Contributed to the understanding of **El Niño** and **Indian Ocean Dipole events**.

Way Forward

- » **Investment in cutting-edge Technologies-** **Advanced weather prediction models & remote sensing technologies** to enhance forecasting capabilities.
- » **Capacity Building and Training-** Enhanced recruitment of **earth scientists** and meteorologists
- » **Public Awareness and Communication-** App for fog monitoring to disseminate realtime info to travellers
- » **Public-Private Partnerships-** IMD must collaborate in the field of meteorology in the same way as **ISRO's collaboration with private sector in Space domain**



What are the objectives and functions of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD)?

About Indian Meteorological Department- The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) is a government agency responsible for providing weather and climate-related services in India. India Meteorological Department(IMD) was established in **1875** with its headquarter located in New Delhi. It is an agency of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** of the Government of India.

IMD was formed in the backdrop of two monstrous cyclones in 1864 which struck the Kolkata and Andhra coast and killed more than one lakh people.

Objective and Functions of IMD- It is responsible for meteorological observations, weather forecasting and

- 1. Meteorological Observation and Statistics-** IMD needs to undertake meteorological observations and statistical work for optimum operation of **weather-sensitive activities** like **agriculture, irrigation, shipping, aviation, offshore oil explorations** etc.
- 2. Disaster Management-** IMD provides warning against severe weather phenomena which cause **destruction of life and property** like **tropical cyclones, norwesters, duststorms, heavy rains and snow, cold and heat waves.**
- 3. Seismological Work-** IMD also undertakes **seismological operations** for earthquake disaster management.
- 4. Naming of Cyclones-** The Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC) of Tropical Cyclones in New Delhi is responsible for **naming the cyclones in the northern Indian Ocean region.**
- 5. Conduct Research and Development-** To conduct and promote **research and development** in meteorology and allied disciplines.

Read More- [India Meteorological Department Marks 150 years of serving the nation](#)

What have been the significant achievements of Indian Meteorological Department?

- 1. Monsoon prediction-** **Meghdoot app** designed by IMD to **provide agro-meteorological services** to the farmers has played a vital role in the development of India's agriculture-dependent economy.
- 2. Weather Forecasting-** **Winter Fog Experiment (WIFEX)** developed by IMD has helped **in the dissemination of fog information**, which is used by airlines and passengers to plan their travel.
- 3. Disaster Management-** **IMD's accurate prediction of the path and intensity of 2020 Cyclone Amphan, 2013 Cyclone Phailin** allowed for timely evacuations and preparedness.
- 4. Air Quality Monitoring-** **IMD's SAFAR system** is being used to monitor air pollution level in major cities such as Delhi.
- 5. Climate Research-** IMD's Climate research has helped in determining India's **NDCs** and **Panchamrit principles** and also contributed to the understanding of **El Niño** and **Indian Ocean Dipole** events.
- 6. Enhanced India's global reputation-** IMD has been recognised as **one of the six** Regional Specialized Meteorological Centres of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). IMD has contributed to the **United Nations' 'Early Warning for All'** programme regarding climate change.

What is the significance of the role of Indian Meteorological Department?

IMD plays a significant multidimensional role which are mentioned below-

- 1. Conducting general Elections-** Dates of the general elections and other state elections, are invariably decided by the ECI **after taking inputs from the IMD.**
- 2. Launch of ISRO missions-** **IMD forecasts** are taken into account while launching ISRO missions like **Chandrayaan-3** and **Aditya L-1.**
- 3. Growth of agricultural sector-** The improved monsoon prediction system of IMD has helped in the growth and development of agricultural and allied sectors like **horticulture, fisheries.**
- 4. Infrastructural growth-** Regular forecast and advisory services of **IMD** are crucial for the operations of **railways, airways, shipping** and **power plant sector.**

5. **Protection of Socially vulnerable communities-** The coastal fishery community, urban poor etc. are all dependent on IMD for protection of their lives and livelihood in cases of extreme weather events like cyclone, urban flash floods.

What are the Challenges faced by the Indian Meteorological Department?

1. **Accurate Monsoon Prediction-** Accurate and precise prediction of the onset, duration and intensity of the monsoon is a major challenge that IMD faces on a year-to-year basis. For Ex- According to the recent parliamentary panel report, IMD has been able to establish only 199 District Ago-Meteorological Units (DAMUs) out of the targeted 660 DAMUs. DAMUs are crucial in monsoon prediction and information dissemination.

2. **Data Assimilation and Modelling-** Incorporation of diverse and accurate data into numerical weather prediction models is another major challenge that IMD faces. For Ex- IMD's challenge in assimilation of satellite data during the 2015 Chennai floods which impacted the accuracy of predictions.

3. **Outdated and insufficient observational infrastructure-** IMD also grapples with the challenge of outdated and insufficient observational infrastructure like the early warning systems. For Ex- Failure of early warning systems in disseminating information about the 2013 Uttarakhand floods.

4. **Urbanization, Localized Weather and Climate Change Impacts-** Adaptation of forecasting methods to account for urbanization effect and Climate change impact is another Achilles heel problem for IMD. For Ex- Urban heat island effect in cities like Delhi pose challenge to IMD's accurate temperature predictions and AQI monitoring.

5. **Lack of human resource capacity-** IMD also faces a dearth of specialized human resources like earth sciences scientists, software developers and scientists. For Ex- IMD's challenge in dealing with emerging technologies such as ensemble forecasting.

6. **Collaboration with neighbouring countries-** IMD also faces the challenge of enhanced collaboration in data sharing related to transboundary air pollution and shared water resources with the meteorological departments of China and Pakistan.

What should be the way forward for IMD?

1. **Enhanced Investment in cutting-edge Technologies-** Continued investment in cutting-edge technologies such as advanced weather prediction models, high-performance computing systems and remote sensing technologies to enhance forecasting capabilities.

2. **Enhanced Observational Infrastructure-** Upgradation and expansion of observational networks which like weather stations, radars and satellites.

3. **Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)-** Incorporation of AI and ML algorithms to analyse vast amounts of meteorological data to improve prediction models and enhance the accuracy of weather forecasts.

4. **Capacity Building and Training-** Enhanced recruitment of earth scientists and training programs to equip meteorologists and staff with the latest knowledge and skills in the field of meteorology.

5. **Public Awareness and Communication-** IMD must also focus on strengthening of communication channels like mobile apps, social media for disseminating weather forecasts and warnings to the public. For Ex- App for Fog monitoring for the passengers to plan their travel.

6. **Public-Private Partnerships in the field of meteorology-** Collaboration with private entities and startups will help IMD in fostering innovation and efficiency in meteorological services. **For Ex- ISRO's collaboration with private sector.**

Implementation of these strategies will help the Indian Meteorological Department evolve and meet the challenges posed by a changing climate, technological advancements, and the increasing demand for accurate and timely weather information.

Read More- [The Print](#)

UPSC Syllabus- Achievements of Indians in Science and Technology, Indigenisation of Technology

Jan Vishwas Act, 2023 – Explained Pointwise | Yojana Summary January 2024

The recently passed **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023** has marked a significant step towards creating a more **business-friendly environment**. It will lay the foundation for improving the **Ease of Doing Business in India**. It seeks to **reduce compliance** and remove the fear of imprisonment for minor offences, to give an impetus to businesses and improve ease of doing business and living, thus bolstering '**trust-based governance**'.

The Act amends **42 Acts** such as the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Patents Act, 1970, etc.



What are the features of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

1) **Decriminalization of Offences:** It decriminalizes minor offences (that do not involve any harm to the public interest or national security) and replaces them with civil penalties or administrative actions. **183 provisions are being decriminalized in 42 Central Acts.**

For example, under the IT Act, 2000, disclosing personal information in breach of a lawful contract is now punishable with a penalty of up to Rs 25 lakh instead of imprisonment of up to three years.

2) **Removal of offences:** The Bill fully removes certain offences. These include all offences under the **Indian Post Office Act, 1898.**

3) **Periodic Revision of Penalties:** The fines and penalties will be increased by 10% of the minimum amount every 3 years.

4) **Adjudicating Officers:** The Government may appoint one or more **Adjudicating Officers to determine penalties.**

Note: An adjudication mechanism is one whereby an administrative or quasi-judicial authority imposes a monetary penalty.

5) **Appellate Mechanisms:** An appellate mechanism is introduced for **grievance redressal** regarding the decision of the adjudicating officer.

What was the need of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

1) **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** The legislation, rules and regulations enacted by the Union and State governments have created **barriers to the smooth flow of ideas, money, and entrepreneurship.** For instance, according to **ORF**, a manufacturing sector enterprise with more than 150 employees deals with 500–900 compliances a year that **cost nearly Rs 12–18 lakh.** It also found that **37.8% of compliances carry imprisonment clauses.**

2) **Barrier to Investments:** A Parliamentary committee noted that regulatory burden poses substantial deterrents for investors. For instance, **lengthy processing times** for the needed approvals can escalate costs and dampen investments

3) **Pressure on the Justice System:** As per the **National Judicial Data Grid**, **3.3 crore cases** out of the 4.4 crore pending cases **are criminal proceedings.**

4) **Presence of Outdated Laws:** The bureaucratic system still consists of the baggage of **archaic and obsolete laws.** These lead to a trust deficit between the people and government institutions.

5) **MSMEs:** There are excessive business regulations in place that lead to unnecessary red tape. For instance, currently, there are **1,536 laws** which translate into around **70,000 compliances** that govern doing business in India. These excessive compliances have proved a burden on MSMEs.

What are the benefits of the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

The benefits of the Act are outlined as under:

1) **Rationalises Criminal Provisions:** Rationalizing criminal provisions will ensure that **people are not dragged to court** for minor, technical or procedural defaults, or unintended violations.

2) **Maintains Proportionality:** It establishes a balance between the severity of the offence/violation committed and the prescribed punishment.

- 3) **Economic Growth:** The elimination of bureaucratic barriers will help in bolstering growth of businesses. The amendments in various laws will **save time and cost** for both Government and Businesses alike.
- 4) **Reduces Pressure on the Justice System:** The criminal proceedings for minor crimes **clog the justice delivery system, leading to delays** in the proceedings of serious offences as well. Provisions such as decriminalisation would go a long way in reducing undue pressure on the justice system.
- 5) **Improve the Health of MSMEs:** The Act lightens the regulatory frameworks and lessens the burden on MSMEs. This would provide them with a **more level playing field** in comparison to their global counterparts.
- 6) **Trust-Based Governance:** It will foster trust-based governance by ensuring that **citizens, businesses, and government departments operate without fear of imprisonment.**

What are the concerns regarding the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023?

- 1) **Not Real Decriminalization:** It replaces imprisonment with fines or penalties, which is not enough for decriminalization. It undertakes what can be called as **'quasi-decriminalisation.'**
- 2) **Expertise of Adjudicating officers:** Concerns have been raised about the appointment of adjudicating officers under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act, **questioning their technical competence** for such legal proceedings.
- 3) **Only a Fraction of Laws Touched:** The number of offences deregulated under the Act are only a small fraction of India's regulatory framework. As per the **ORF**, of the 42 Acts of Parliament mentioned, **only 23 Acts impact the ease of doing business**, which is a tiny fraction.
- 4) **Issues with respect to Environment Protection:** According to the **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy**, the blanket removal of imprisonment provision might also remove the deterrence effect of the environmental legislation, especially for large corporations.
- 5) **Issues with respect to Privacy:** The Act punishes officers of post offices for the illegal opening of postal articles with imprisonment of up to two years, a fine, or both. Deleting these offences removes the safeguards against invasions of privacy.
- 6) **Independence of Adjudicating Officers:** At times, **government agencies violate the Air Act and the EP Act.** This raises the question, whether government officers would be sufficiently independent as adjudicating authorities in such cases.

Way Forward:

- 1) **Reassess and Strengthen Decriminalization Efforts:** Conduct a thorough review to ensure genuine decriminalization by replacing imprisonment with more **rehabilitative measures, community service, or other alternatives** that address the core issues without resorting to punitive measures.
- 2) **Ensure Expertise of Adjudicating Officers:** Institute a **transparent and merit-based appointment process for adjudicating officers** under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act and the Environment (Protection) Act.
- 3) **Ensuring Independence of Adjudicating Officers:** Implement safeguards, such as an independent oversight body, to monitor and address potential conflicts of interest, ensuring **fair and impartial adjudication.**
- 4) **Public Consultation and Feedback Mechanism:** Foster a transparent and inclusive legislative process by involving the **public, environmental experts, and stakeholders** in discussions related to legislative changes.

By adopting these measures, it is possible to address the concerns raised and create a legal framework that not only promotes ease of doing business but also upholds environmental protection, privacy rights, and the integrity of legal proceedings.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 – Explained Pointwise

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 titled 'Beyond Basics' has been released by the Pratham Foundation. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023, focuses on **14-18 year olds in rural areas**. This age group that is critical to India's unlocking its demographic dividend.



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ASER 2023

- » The ASER report examines the **schooling status** and **foundational learning** of children across districts and states of rural India.
- » The ASER 2023 is based on a survey conducted in **28 districts across 26 states**, reaching out to 34,745 youths in the 14-18 age group.

Highlights of Report

- » **More students transiting to secondary education-** ASER 2023 notes that 'today more children in India have more years of schooling than ever before'.
- » **High enrolment rate-** Overall, **86.8% of 14-18-year-olds** are enrolled in an educational institution.
- » **Foundational skill gaps-** About, **25% cannot read Grade 2 text**, and **over 50% face difficulties with arithmetic skills** expected by Grade 5
- » **Underutilisation of Digital technology-** Despite high availability of **smartphones in rural households (95%)**, their use for educational purposes is limited
- » **Balancing Academics and Family Responsibilities-** Youths face compounded challenges such as **working in family farms**
- » **Gender Disparity in Digital Skills-** **43.7% of males own smartphones** as compared to **19.8% of females**.
- » **Vocational training-** The survey shows a low enrolment in vocational training, with **only 5.6% of young people participating**.

Reasons for low skills

- » **Inadequate Teacher-student ratio and teacher's Training-** Almost **8% of India's schools** have only **one teacher**. Teachers lack training in modern pedagogical methods
- » **Insufficient Learning Resources-** Lack of reading materials affects **students' language development**.
- » **Socioeconomic Disparities-** Lower-income families **inadequate infrastructure, lack of educational support at home**.
- » **Language Barriers-** Students from **tribal regions, face English reading barriers**
- » **Assessment Practices-** Assessments have primarily **focused on memorization** rather than **critical thinking**

Way Forward

- » **Devolution of central and state grants to local bodies-** The Central and State grants should be **disaggregated gram panchayat-wise and urban local body-wise**
- » **Community management of schools-** The Mid-Day Meal responsibility should be handed over to the village-level **self-help group (SHG)** of women
- » **Regular school-level interactions with parents-** The **Nipun Bharat Mission** to ensure oral and written literacy and numeracy should become a people's movement like the Total Literacy Campaign.

What is the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)? What is the methodology used?

ASER- The ASER report is facilitated by **Pratham Education Foundation** since 2005. The ASER report examines the **schooling status** and **foundational learning of children** across districts and states of rural India. Originally it was an annual publication but after 2016, it has become a biennial report. ASER reports are usually referred to by the government while formulating policies.

ASER 2023 Methodology- The ASER 2023 is based on a survey conducted in **28 districts across 26 states**, reaching out to **34,745 youths** in the **14-18 age group**. One rural district was surveyed in each major state, except for Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where two such districts were surveyed.

The youths were surveyed on 4 points-

- a. Basic reading, maths and English abilities
- b. Application of basic skills to everyday calculations
- c. Reading and understanding written instructions
- d. Financial calculations that need to be done in real life

What are the positive and negative findings of Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023?**Positive findings in terms of enrolment ratios**

1. **More students transiting to secondary education-** ASER 2023 notes that **'today more children in India have more years of schooling than ever before'**. Apprehensions that the pandemic-induced economic distress would result in older children dropping out of school have been belied.

2. **High enrolment rate-** Overall, **86.8%** of **14-18-year-olds** are enrolled in an educational institution. The percentage of youth not enrolled is **3.9%** for 14-year-old youth and **32.6%** for 18-year-olds. Most of the people in this age group were enrolled in the Arts/Humanities streams.

Challenges and failings of the Education system

1. **Foundational skill gaps in reading and arithmetic abilities-** About **25%** cannot read Grade 2 text, and over **50%** face difficulties with arithmetic skills expected by **Grade 5**, highlighting a **deficit in foundational learning**.

2. **Poor Quality Labour force-** This deficit in foundational numeracy and foundational skill gap significantly impacts the quality of the country's labour force.

3. **Underutilisation of Digital technology-** Despite the high availability of smartphones in rural households (95%), their **use for educational purposes is limited**.

4. **Balancing Academics and Family Responsibilities-** Most of the youths face **compounded challenges** as they need to balance academic requirements with responsibilities, such as **working in family farms**. These responsibilities impact the aspirations of youth.

5. **Gender Disparity in Reading and Arithmetic Skills-** Males performed better than females in arithmetic and English reading across most of the tasks that test the ability to apply basic numeracy and reading skills. **For Ex- Only 41.1% females were able to tell the time compared to 51% males. Fewer females (28.1%) are in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics stream (STEM) stream as compared to males (36.3%).**

6. **Gender Disparity in Digital Skills-** 43.7% of males own smartphones as compared to 19.8% of females. Across all phone-related tasks assigned to respondents, boys outperformed girls.

7. **Vocational training-** The survey shows a low enrolment in vocational training, with only **5.6% of young people participating**.

Read More- [ASER 2023](#)

What are the reasons behind the low foundational skill gaps as highlighted by the ASER 2023?

- Inadequate Teacher-student ratio and teacher's Training-** Almost **8% of India's schools have only one teacher** (2023 data). Teachers **lack training in modern pedagogical methods**, and struggle to employ interactive and engaging teaching techniques. This has impacted students' understanding of basic concepts of arithmetic and reading ability.
- Insufficient Learning Resources-** Limited access to textbooks and learning materials have hindered students' ability to practice and reinforce foundational skills outside the classroom. **For ex- Lack of reading materials affects students' language development.**
- Socioeconomic Disparities-** Students from lower-income families face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, **lack of educational support at home** and **limited access to extracurricular activities** that enhance their foundational skills.
- Language Barriers-** Students in regions where the language of instruction is not their native language face challenges in understanding and expressing themselves. **For ex- Students from tribal regions, face English reading barriers.**
- Outdated Curriculum-** School Curriculum **doesn't incorporate digital literacy** and have left students unprepared with digital skills to be a part of the modern workforce.
- Assessment Practices-** Assessments have primarily **focussed on memorization rather than critical thinking**, which has led to students prioritizing rote learning over understanding foundational concepts.

What are the different government initiatives taken for the improvement of school education?

Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan (SSA)	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Government of India to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) , covering the entire country in a mission mode.
NIPUN Bharat	To achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school by 2025.
PM-POSHAN Scheme/Mid-Day Meal Scheme	The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is a school meal programme in India designed to better the nutritional standing of school-age children nationwide. The scheme has been renamed as PM-POSHAN Scheme.
SWAYAM Programme	SWAYAM is a programme initiated by Government of India and designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy that is access, equity and quality .
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Abhiyan	School Management Committees which achieve 100% transition of girls at different levels of education to be awarded under part of the scheme.

What are the recommendations of ASER 2023 to improve foundational skills?

- Devolution of central and state grants to local bodies** – The Central and State grants should be **disaggregated gram panchayat-wise and urban local body-wise**. This will ensure direct transfer of untied funds to schools.
- Community management of schools-** Schools must be community-managed, and the State government should primarily act as the financing agent. The **private sector should be encouraged to adopt schools** to

improve their quality. **For ex-** The Mid-Day Meal responsibility should be handed over to the village-level self-help group (SHG) of women.

3. **Regular school-level interactions with parents-** Teachers must build a relationship with every household to ensure children's care and learning. Parental involvement can greatly improve learning outcomes. **For ex-** The Nipun Bharat Mission to ensure oral and written literacy and numeracy should become a people's movement like the Total Literacy Campaign.

4. **Leveraging smartphones to improve learning outcomes-** Smartphones can be used to deliver online modules to students to supplement classroom teaching. **For ex-** Interactive online tests should be designed in the form of games for the students.

5. **Innovative learning methods-** Indoor and outdoor sports, cultural activities, play-way learning items, video films, and sound boxes must be used to supplant learning.

6. **Development of Public libraries-** Public libraries should be developed to address the scarcity of learning resources. **For ex-** The Karnataka government has done commendable work on strengthening its public libraries, which has also positively impacted school learning outcomes.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Indo-African Relationship amid South-South Cooperation

India-Africa relationship has strengthened in recent times, with the African Union's induction into the G-20 group as the 21st member under India's presidency. Africa has been a central focal point in India's engagement with the Global South. India has positioned itself as a legitimate voice for the welfare of the countries of Africa, as the founding father of NAM and an active participant in the G-77 deliberations.



Source- The Diplomatist

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What is the history of India-Africa Relationship?

Historical Cultural and Trade Relationship- Trade relationship existed between the Indus Valley and the contemporary African civilisations. There was a development of 'monsoon culture' through the trade culture, with the close association of people from both continents. The colonial phase saw the forceful migration of indentured labourers or girimitiyas to British colonies in Africa.

Historical Political Relationship- Gandhiji's tools of civil disobedience and non-cooperation were tested on the soil of Africa. India and Africa used this ideological and historical ties in a decolonised world to oppose neo-colonialism. India and Africa also collaborated in the Bandung conference to advance the agenda of the Global South, which ultimately led to the formation of NAM.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India-Africa amid South-South Cooperation?

1. Political cooperation-

- a. Regionalisation and reorientation of global governance norms on the 21st century have produced many strong political institutions amid the south-south Cooperation. For ex- Asia Africa Growth corridor (AAGC), Build Back Better (B3W), Blue Dot Network, ADB.
- b. India and Africa have converged on the UNSC membership expansion, and India has supported the Ezulwini Consensus.
- c. India has also stepped its engagement in regional organisations like ECOWAS, African continental Free trade Agreement, BRICS, OIC, NDB etc.

2. Economic cooperation-

- a. India has increased its investments in Africa to boost Africa's economic growth and reduce the poverty levels in the global south. For ex- EXIM Bank's Focus Africa Programme, India-Africa Partnership project, India-Southern African Customs Union Preferential Trade Agreement.
- b. Overall trade between India-Africa has touched \$100 bn in 2022-23.
- c. 22.5% India's FDI outwards flow is towards Africa. India's current investment in Africa is around \$32 bn with companies like ONGC Videsh making investments in India.

3. **Security cooperation-** India-Africa share security cooperation synergies on issues like curbing piracy, humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) and maritime security.

4. **Climate change and Technology cooperation-** India and Africa have been cooperating in the climate change domain through organisations like ISA and CDRI. These organisations have also helped India extend its soft power influence in the region of Africa.

5. **P2P cooperation-** India has provided Africa with India's skilled workforce like engineers, trained nurses, digital public infrastructure and health care equity.

What is the significance of India-Africa Relationship?

1. **Huge Economic Potential:** The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a wide scope to create the largest free trade area in the world by geography and an opportunity to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty. It can help promote India-Africa bilateral trade and investment under AfCFTA.

2. **Potential for Indian Businesses-** There are opportunities in services trade with Africa in the fields of Information Technology (IT), Mobile payment solutions, banking, and financial services.

3. **Infrastructure Development in the African Continent-** India has the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. Thus, it could count on its strengths to fortify the digital infrastructure in Africa. It can contribute to the achievement of the continent's Agenda 2063.

4. **Achievement of Common Agendas-** Most African nations are developing in nature just like India, which creates a common understanding on multiple issues. India and Africa share common grounds on **reformation of the UNSC, Climate change agreements, Trade Issues** and **WTO negotiations**.
5. **Soft Power-** Successful transformation of Africa into a '**continent of growth**' from the '**continent of darkness**' would enhance **India's soft power** and **leadership position** in the global south.

What are the Challenges in India-Africa Relationship?

1. **Africa as ground of Geopolitical contest-** There is sharpening of competition among at least half a dozen external partners such as **China, Russia, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates**. The competition is mainly for strengthening their relations with parts of Africa to **ensure market access, gain energy and mineral security**, and **increase political and economic influence**.
2. **Increasing Chinese assertiveness-** China has emerged as '**the infrastructure developer**', '**the resource provider**', and '**the financier**.' It has invested enormously in Africa in terms of money, materials and diplomatic push. Since 2007, Chinese leaders have visited the continent 123 times, while 251 African leaders have visited China. This has **limited India's room in the region's geopolitical arena**.
3. **Lack of clear strategy on the part of India-** India's model of development cooperation in Africa lacks a clear strategy in comparison with the Chinese Model. India also **lacks the deep pockets as Chinese** to invest deeply into the African economy.
4. **Lack of Focus-** **Geopolitical tensions in Asia** and the **imperative to consolidate its position in the Indo-Pacific region** have compelled India to deviate from greater focus on the India-Africa relationship. Instead, India concentrated on its ties with the **United Kingdom, the EU**, and the **Quad powers**.
5. **Racial Attacks-** Incidents of racial attacks on African nationals have severely dented India's image in the region.

Read More- [India-Africa Relation](#)

What Should be The Way Ahead to Strengthen India-Africa Relations?

1. **Strengthen Political and Diplomatic Cooperation-** India must restore periodic leaders' summits through the **India-Africa Forum Summit**. India must establish a **dedicated secretary** in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for African affairs.
2. **Enhance Defence and Security Cooperation-** India must **increase the number of defence attachés** in Africa and expand dialogue on defence issues. India must also strengthen maritime collaboration and extend Lines of Credit to facilitate defence exports.
3. **Deepen Economic and Development Cooperation-** India must promote India-Africa trade through the creation of an **Africa Growth Fund (AGF)** to enhance access to finance. India must also implement measures to improve project exports and enhance cooperation in the shipping domain.
4. **Increase Socio-Cultural Cooperation-** There must be facilitation of greater interaction between Indian and African universities, think tanks, civil society, and media organisations. India must establish a **National Centre for African Studies** and **rename** Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (**ITEC**) and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (**ICCR**) scholarships after famous African figures.
5. **Implementation of the 'Roadmap 2030' and PM's 10 guiding principles-** India must establish a special mechanism for implementing the '**Roadmap 2030**' through **collaboration between the MEA** and the **National Security Council Secretariat**.

By following this roadmap and implementing the recommended measures, India can further strengthen its partnership with Africa, contribute to its growing global stature and leadership among the countries of global south.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- International Relations- India Africa Relations

India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise

The close India-Bangladesh relations was again illustrated when PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ms. Hasina on her return to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term. Ms. Hasina's party, the **Awami League**, **secured two-thirds** of the seats in the January 7, 2024 national elections. The **win is significant for India**, as Ms. Hasina is seen as one of India's closest friends and allies & has fostered a friendly and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. However, **concerns were raised** about the lack of participation of the principal opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party-Jamaat-e-Islami coalition.



India-Bangladesh Relations

The **close India-Bangladesh relations** was again illustrated when PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ms. Sheikh Hasina on her return to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term.



India-Bangladesh Relations

- » The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the **1971 Bangladesh Liberation War**. India provided critical military support in its independence.
- » India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was **anti-Indian sentiment**.
- » After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, there has been **deepening of India-Bangladesh relations**.



Areas of Cooperation

- » **Political Cooperation**- Indian PM's visit to take part in their **golden Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh Independence, Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.
- » **Land Boundary Agreement (2015)**- Swapping of the disputed enclaves.
- » **Economic cooperation**- India is the **second-biggest trade partner** of Bangladesh, bilateral trade between India-Bangladesh has reached **\$18 billion in 2021-2022**, **duty-free quota access** to Bangladesh under SAFTA & **joint feasibility study** on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)
- » **Infrastructure Cooperation**-India as a '**major development partner**' of Bangladesh, **extended Lines of Credits worth over \$7 billion**, **Ahaura-Agartala rail link**, **Maitri Setu**
- » **Energy cooperation**-Bangladesh **importing 2,000 MWs of electricity** from India, **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline** for high speed diesel supply.



Significance

- » **Geo-strategic**- Bangladesh provides India with **access to the Bay of Bengal** and an important route for **trade and connectivity** with Southeast Asia
- » **Geo-political**- Cooperation on issues such as **counter-terrorism and border security** and **India's bid for UNSC permanent membership**
- » **Economic**- Critical for India becoming a **\$5 trillion economy** and achievement of **goals of new FTP**.
- » **Cultural and civilisational**- Large Hindu Bengali population in Bangladesh and religious sites like **Ranir Bungalow Temple, Bhoj Vihara**



Challenges

- » **Sharing of Transboundary River Waters- Teesta river water dispute.**
- » **Deportation of Rohingyas**- India seeks to give **primacy to deportation from its mainland first** and then **later facilitate deportation** from Bangladesh
- » **Cross-Border terrorism, infiltration & Drug Smuggling & Trafficking**- Raised additional threats to **internal security**.
- » **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh**
- » **Attacks on minorities across both the borders**



Way Forward

- » **Early resolution of Transboundary river water Dispute**
- » **Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh FTA**
- » **Establishment of Joint Task Forces, Smart Border Management.**

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What is the history of India-Bangladesh Relations?

India-Bangladesh relationship are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. The relationship is deep-rooted in history. However, the relationship also had its share of highs and lows.

<p>During Bangladesh Independence (Phase of High)</p>	<p>The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan. The very first Independent government of Bangladesh, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was formed and administered from Theatre Road in Kolkata.</p>
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During the Military rule in Bangladesh (Phase of low)	India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was a rise in anti-India sentiment, during the military rules of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1991), over issues ranging from boundary disputes, insurgency and water-sharing .
After the return of Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh in 1991 (Phase of repair and towards high)	After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, India and Bangladesh scripted a new chapter of cooperation in bilateral ties with a treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters . Since then, India and Bangladesh have built cooperation in trade, energy, infrastructure, connectivity and defence.

What is the significance of India-Bangladesh Relations?

- 1. Geo-strategic-** Bangladesh holds significant geostrategic importance for India as India's eastern neighbour. Bangladesh provides India with **access to the Bay of Bengal** and an **important route for trade and connectivity** with **Southeast Asia**.
- 2. Geo-political-** A stable and friendly Bangladesh is crucial for India's security. Geo-political cooperation on issues such as **counter-terrorism** and **border security** is vital for maintaining peace in the South Asian region. Support of Bangladesh is crucial in India's bid for **UNSC permanent membership**.
- 3. Economic-** Bangladesh is a critical economy for **India's exports and bilateral trade**. Deepening of India-Bangladesh economic relationship is crucial for India achieving its goal under the new foreign trade policy and of becoming a \$5 trillion economy.
- 4. Cultural and civilisational-** Bangladesh has large number of Hindu Bengali population and has large number of religious-cultural sites associated with India such as **Ranir Bunglow Temple, Bhoj Vihara**.
- 5. International cooperation-** Active cooperation between India and Bangladesh is crucial to success of regional forums such as the **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and **COPs to UNFCCC**.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India and Bangladesh?

- 1. Political Cooperation-** India and Bangladesh have maintained close political relationship among them, with frequent bilateral visits and close bonhomie between the heads of the government. **For Ex-**
 - a. Indian PM's** visit to Bangladesh to take part in their **golden Jubilee celebrations of Independence**.
 - b. India** has awarded **Gandhi Peace Price 2020** to Bangladesh's founding president **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.
 - c. Bangladesh's** PM Sheikh Hasina visit to India to take part in the **G-20 summit**.
- 2. Land Boundary Agreement (2015)-** India and Bangladesh **swapped the disputed islands** and allowed the inhabitants to choose their country of residence. This solved a **major long-standing dispute** between India and Bangladesh.
- 3. Economic cooperation-** Bangladesh has emerged as India's largest trade partner in South Asia. India is the **second-biggest trade partner** of Bangladesh.
 - a. The bilateral trade** between India-Bangladesh has reached **\$18 billion in 2021-2022** from **\$10.8 billion in 2020-21**.
 - b. India and Bangladesh** have also concluded a **joint feasibility study** on a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** in 2022 to reduce or eliminate custom duties on traded goods.

- c. India has provided **duty-free quota** access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines, except tobacco and alcohol, under **South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)** since 2011.
4. **Infrastructure Cooperation**- India is a '**major development partner**' of Bangladesh, as India is funding several infrastructure and connectivity projects in Bangladesh.
- a. India has extended Lines of Credits worth over \$7 billion to Bangladesh since 2010.
- b. **Ahaura-Agartala rail link** has been inaugurated that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura. The link has given India access to **Chattogram** and **Mongla ports** in Bangladesh for the movement of cargo. It is likely to boost small-scale industries and develop Assam and Tripura.
- c. '**Maitri Setu**' bridge which is a 1.9 km long bridge connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh has been inaugurated.
- d. **Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service** launched in 2015 has reduced the distance between Kolkata and Agartala from **1,650 km** (through chicken's neck or Siliguri corridor) to just **500 km**.
5. **Energy cooperation**- Bangladesh imports **nearly 2,000 megawatts of electricity** from India. The **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**, connecting Siliguri in West Bengal and Parbatipur in Bangladesh, will transport **one million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMTPA)** of **High-Speed Diesel** to Bangladesh.
6. **Defence Cooperation**- India- Bangladesh border of **4096.7 km** is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. India and Bangladesh conduct Joint Exercises like **Exercise Sampriti** (Army) and **Exercise Bongosagar** (Navy).
7. **Tourism sector**- Bangladeshis make up a **large portion** of tourists in India. In 2017, the number of tourists from Bangladesh outnumbered all the tourists arriving from Western Europe.
8. **Medical Cooperation**- Bangladesh accounts for more than **35% of India's international medical patients** and contributes to more than **50% of India's revenue from medical tourism**.

What are the areas of Tension in India-Bangladesh Relations?

1. **Sharing of Transboundary River Waters**- India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers, but only two transboundary river water sharing treaties have been signed, so far- Ganga Waters Treaty and The Kushiya River Treaty. **For Ex-** Major point of contention is the **Teesta river water dispute**. Bangladesh seeks equitable distribution of Teesta waters, which has not been agreed by India and its state of West Bengal.
2. **Deportation of Rohingyas**- India and Bangladesh have mutual but conflicting interests in deportation of Rohingyas to mainland Myanmar. India **seeks to give primacy to deportation from its mainland first** and then later facilitate deportation from Bangladesh to Myanmar.
3. **Cross-Border terrorism and infiltration**- Cross-border terrorism and infiltration through the Bangladesh border have **raised additional threats to internal security** of India. **Armed Dacoity** in border districts, **fake money transfer, cattle smuggling** and **prostitution** have also raised internal security concerns in India.
4. **Drug Smuggling & Trafficking**- According to **2007 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)** report, the drugs trafficking through India from Bangladesh, remains a prime transit point of trafficking heroin from South Asia to Europe.
5. **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh**- Bangladesh is an **active partner** in the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. China has made substantial investments in Bangladeshi infrastructure by building **12 highways, 21 bridges** and **27 power and energy projects**. China's increasing involvement with Bangladesh potentially undermines India's regional standing and impede its strategic aspirations.

6. **Attacks on minorities across both the borders-** The ethnic attacks on **Bangla-speaking Hindus** in Bangladesh and the **attacks on Bangladeshi's in India** have strained the India-Bangladesh P2P and cultural relation.

Read More- [Emerging Challenges for India after the Bangladesh Elections](#)

What Should be the way forward for India-Bangladesh Relationship?

1. **Early resolution of Transboundary river water Disputes-** The **early resolution of Teesta** is the better way to boost India-Bangladesh relations by the formation of **tripartite committee** of India, Bangladesh and West Bengal.
2. **Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA)-** Bangladesh is set to **lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026**, thereby losing its duty-free and quota-free market access in India. Hence India **finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh** at the earliest. India must also ensure that the FTA is not misused by China to dump goods in India through RCEP agreement (Bangladesh is also a member of RCEP agreement).
3. **Establishment of Joint Task Forces and Smart Border Management-** There is a need to establish joint task forces comprising law enforcement agencies from both countries to effectively **combat cross-border drug smuggling, human trafficking and Illegal immigration**.
4. **Establishment Digital Connectivity Corridor-** There is a need to establish a digital connectivity corridor between the two countries, focusing on **high-speed internet connectivity, digital services, and e-commerce**. This can create new avenues for trade, collaboration, and technological exchange.
5. **Restoration of Global image of Bangladesh-** India must help in restoring the global image of Bangladesh which has been facing U.S. Sanctions on account of '**democratic backsliding**' and '**human rights violations**'. India must work closely with the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh to reduce the ethnic attacks on Bangla speaking Hindus.

One of the prime interest is developing North-East India, better connectivity to South-East Asian Countries and exploring the Indo-Pacific region. To achieve that, deepening of India-Bangladesh relations is a significant step.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- India and its neighbourhood Relations- India-Bangladesh

Indian Post Office Act 2023- Explained Pointwise



Recently, the **Indian Post Office Act 2023** enacted by the Parliament replaced the colonial Indian Post Office Act of 1898. According to the government, the newly passed Post Office Act 2023 is an attempt to ensure the **effective functioning of the Postal Department** as a **messenger service** and as a **provider of banking facilities**. However, the new Act is being **criticised** on the grounds of **violation of the right to privacy** and **encouraging state surveillance**.



Indian Post Office Act 2023

Recently, Post Office Act 2023 was enacted by the Parliament which **replaced the colonial** Indian Post Office Act of 1898

Indian Post Office Act 2023	Indian Post Office Act 1898
Removes the exclusive privilege of the central government of conveying letters by post.	Section 4 provided for exclusive privilege of central government in conveying letters by post.
Services offered by India Post to be specified by Central Govt	Services to be offered by India Post were mentioned in the Act itself
Appointment of a Director General of Postal Services to fix charges for the services offered	Need for parliamentary approval to fix the charges of the services offered by the postal department
Expansion of grounds under which the postal articles can be intercepted like state security, friendly state relations	Interception on grounds of Public emergency which disturbs public safety, tranquillity.
Exemption from liability in case of loss, theft of parcel	Liability in case of theft, loss of parcel

Significance

- » **Sheds the colonial legacy** of the Indian Post Act of 1898 like **IPC, CrPC**
- » **Addresses the evolving role** of Post Offices in India like **Banking services, service deliveries**
- » **Increased autonomy and Independence**- Can fix own rate for services , **no parliamentary approval** needed
- » **Regulation of private courier services**- Private courier services were not regulated under the old act.

Concerns

- » **Lack of Procedural Safeguards**- Unlike the safeguards under **Telegraph Rules 2007** and **IT Rules 2009**
- » **Vague Definition of 'Emergency'**- Will lead to potential arbitrary use of power
- » **Exemption from Liability for Lapses in Services**- In contrast with other commercial govt departments like railways which fix liability by **Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987**
- » **Removal of all Offenses and Penalties**- Impact on **privacy of individual** and lead to inefficient functioning
- » **Against the SC rulings in Puttaswamy case** and **38th Law Commission recommendations**

Way Forward

- » **Incorporate Robust Procedural Safeguards** like **oversight mechanisms, judicial warrants**
- » **Define the Grounds for Interception** like 'emergency'
- » **Balanced Liability Framework** like clear liability rules
- » **Incorporation of the provisions for penalties**

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What are The Key Provisions of The Newly Passed Indian Post Office Act 2023? How is It Different From The Indian Post Office Act 1898?

Aim of the Act- The Post Office Act 2023 aims to consolidate and amend the law relating to Post Office in India. Post Office today provides many services beyond simply mail delivery.

Key Provisions	Indian Post Office Act 2023	Indian Post Office Act 1898
Exclusive Privileges of the Central Government	It removes the exclusive privilege of the central government of conveying letters by post .	Section 4 of the act made the conveyance of letters by post an exclusive privilege of the Central government

Services to be provided by the India Post	India Post to provide services as may be prescribed by the central government.	The Act specified the services to be provided by India Post which included delivery of postal articles , including letters, postcards, parcels, and money orders.
Director General of Postal Services	Appointment of a Director General of Postal Services to regulate postal activities and fix charges for the services offered	Parliamentary approval needed while revising the set charges for any services provided by post offices
Powers to intercept postal articles	Grounds -Expansion of grounds under which the postal articles can be intercepted- the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, emergency, public safety. Interception -Central Govt can empower any officer to carry out the interception.	Grounds -Interception of the articles on the grounds of – occurrence of any public emergency, in the interest of public safety, tranquility. Interception - Can be carried out by the central government, state governments, or any officer specially authorized by them.
Examination of postal articles prohibited under law or liable for duty	The act removes the power of examination of prohibited parcels of the Indian post official. The Indian Post official has to deliver the parcel to custom authority or any other specified authority for examination.	Under the Indian Post Office Act 1898, an officer in charge could examine a postal article if he suspected that it contained prohibited goods and items
Exemption from liability, penalties and offences	Under the new Act, post office or post officials have been exempted from liability for loss, misdelivery, delay or damage of postal articles.	Under the previous Act, the post office and post officials had liability for loss, misdelivery, delay and damage of postal articles. For ex- Theft of postal articles carried upto 7 years jail.
Recovery of Unpaid postal charges	Under the new Act, the unpaid postal charges could be recovered as land revenue.	There was no provision for the recovery of unpaid postal charges
Regulation of Private Courier Services	The new act has brought the private courier services under its ambit.	There was no provision of regulation of private courier services

What is The Significance of The New Indian Post Office Act 2023?

- Sheds the colonial legacy-** The newly passed Act sheds the Colonial legacy of the Indian Post Office Act of 1898. This is in line with the decolonisation of various laws like the **IPC** and **CrPC**.
- Addresses the evolving role of Post Offices in India-** The role of Post Offices have been evolving in India like the banking roles (creation of India Post Payment Bank). The new Act incorporates provisions to address these evolving roles. **For Ex- Creation of Director General of Postal Services to identify the new services** which can be offered by post Offices like **service delivery**.
- Increased autonomy and Independence-** The Indian Post can determine its own rates of services. This provides greater autonomy to the Indian Post, unlike the previous act of 1898 where **parliamentary approval was needed for even fixing the rates** of postal services.

4. **Regulation of private courier services-** This will help in effectively regulating the growing private courier service industry to prevent practices like the **supply of contra bands like drugs through private couriers**.

5. **Addresses the changing demands of Digital era-** The new Act aims to attenuate the role and functions of the Indian posts to the demands of the digital era.

Want To Know More-

- **Economics of Animal Rearing- Explained Pointwise**
- **Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations**

What are The Concerns with The Indian Post Office Act 2023?

1. **Lack of Procedural Safeguards-** The Bill does not specify any procedural safeguards against the interception of postal articles. This may **violate the right to privacy**, and the **freedom of speech and expression**. **For Ex-** Previous acts like the Telegraph Act and the IT Act have rules of interception to prevent violation of right to privacy like **Telegraph Rules, 2007** and **IT Rules, 2009**.

2. **Vague Definition of 'Emergency'-** The Act allows interception in 'emergencies' but doesn't define emergency. This will lead to **potential arbitrary use of power**.

3. **Exemption from Liability for Lapses in Services-** The new Act removes liabilities of the postal department officials with respect to postal delivery. This is in **contrast with the rules of liability** of other commercial service providers of the government, like the **Indian railways**. **For ex- Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987** provides for tribunals to **hear cases of liabilities and lapses** against railway officials.

4. **Removal of all Offenses and Penalties-** The earlier offences and penalties against the postal officials in **cases of theft, illegal opening of postal articles** etc. have been removed in the new act. This may have adverse implications for the right to privacy of individuals.

5. **Against India's International obligations-** **Article 17** of the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** states that **no one should face arbitrary interference** with their **privacy**. As India is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the new act contradicts with India's international obligations.

6. **Against the SC rulings and Law Commission recommendations-** SC in **K.S. Puttaswamy case (2017)** held the right to communication as a part of the right to privacy to be protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. Further, the **38th Report of Law Commission on Indian Post Office Act, 1898** recommended the incorporation of an explicit definition of 'public emergency' in the act. The new Indian Post Office Act **fails to incorporate both the directives of both**, as it **permits arbitrary interception** and **does not incorporate a detailed definition of emergency**.

7. **Regulatory Disparities-** The Post Office Act 2023 retains the disparities in the regulation of couriers and postal departments. **For Ex- The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 is applicable to private courier services**, but it **does not apply to services by India Post**.

Read More- [Concerns related to India's Post Office and Telecommunications laws](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Incorporate Robust Procedural Safeguards-** Clear and comprehensive procedural safeguards like **oversight mechanisms, judicial warrants** must be introduced for the interception of articles transmitted through India Post.

2. **Define the Grounds for Interception-** The grounds for interception like 'emergency' must be clearly defined as recommended by the 38th Law Commission Report.

3. **Balanced Liability Framework-** The Post Office's accountability must be ensured by setting clear rules for liability without jeopardizing its independence and efficiency.

4. **Incorporation of the provisions for penalties-** A legal framework that holds individuals accountable for misconduct, fraud, theft must be established to safeguard the privacy of individuals.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS paper2- polity- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Kurukshetra Rural Startups in 2024

In recent times, there has been a surge in rural startups catering to rural needs. The rural startups range from agritech and e-commerce platforms to healthcare and education services which are specifically tailored for rural communities. There has been an unprecedented growth in rural startups with a big government push since 2014.



Rural Startups-Significance and Challenges

In recent times, there has been a **surge in rural startups catering to rural needs**. The rural startups range from agritech and e-commerce platforms to healthcare and education services which are specifically tailored for rural communities



Rural Startups

- » A **rural startup** is a company or an entrepreneurial venture whose products and services cater to the demands of rural India.
- » **Examples of Rural Startups**
 - a. **AgriTech- Fasal** and **BigHaat** use artificial intelligence and data analytics for providing valuable information to the farmers.
 - b. **E-commerce- Meesho** has partnered with M/o Rural Development to sell products of SHGs under NRLM on its platform.
 - c. **Edtech- Learning Delight, Paathshala Learning** have been addressing rural-urban education divide
 - d. **FinTech- Aye Finance, BankSathi** and **BharatPe** have been revolutionising access to financial services



Significance

- » **Employment Generation-** Employment opportunities to rural youth who are under **disguised unemployment in agricultural sector**
- » **Education and Skill Development-** Rural-urban divide in accessing education has been abridged
- » **Promotion of Financial Inclusion-** Rural fintech startups like Bank Saathi, Bharatpe have revolutionised the fintech sector by providing **digital payment solutions**.
- » **Women empowerment-** The SHG led startups like **Lijjat Papad, AMUL** have led to the socio-political and economic empowerment of rural women.
- » **Environmental Sustainability-** Contributing to the vision of clean and green India by focussing on renewable energy like **Biogas, solar** and **Wind Energy**.



Challenges

- » **Connectivity gap with Suppliers in Urban Areas-** Results in **delays, increased costs, and logistical complexities** for rural startups
- » **Financial accessibility-** Face issues such as **reluctance of lending by financial institutions, limited availability of banking services** in rural areas.
- » **Lack of Support System-** The **absence/lack of mentorship, networking opportunities, and incubation centres** have impeded the growth of rural startups.
- » **Difficulty in Finding Early Adopters in Rural Areas-** Due to **lower income and lower digital penetration**
- » **Limited Funding Mechanism in Rural Areas-** **92% of startup funding** taken up by urban startups



Way Forward

- » **Policy Support-** To address **infrastructure gaps, access to finance, and skill development**
- » **Community Engagement-** The **startups led by SHGs** must be promoted
- » **Mechanism for measuring Impact-** Measure **social and economic impact** of rural startups.
- » **Sustainability instead of Scalability-** The rural startups **must not mimic the trajectory of urban startups** to become unicorns. They must aim to **evolve into sustainable employment generating enterprises**



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What are Different Types Of Rural Startups Working in India?

A rural startup is a company or an entrepreneurial venture whose products and services cater to the demands of rural India.

Different types of rural startups in India

a. **Founders based in urban areas, with solutions catering to rural areas-** These entrepreneurs leverage their urban upbringing, access to resources and exposure to technology to create innovative solutions tailored to rural needs. **For ex- Online platforms connecting farmers with markets, telemedicine services, and digital learning solutions for rural students.**

b. **Founders belonging to rural areas with solutions catering to rural areas-** These entrepreneurs leverage their first-hand knowledge of local challenges, cultural nuances and community dynamics to develop solutions

to rural needs. **For ex-** Ventures focussed on agricultural innovations, rural craft preservation and community centric initiatives.

c. **Self Help Groups (SHGs)**- Self-help groups (SHGs) represent a unique form of rural entrepreneurship, where individuals within a community come together to create a collective entity. **For Ex-** Anand Milk Union Ltd. (AMUL) is one of the most successful enterprise built on this model.

d. **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)**- In India, more than 50% of the total 6.3 crore MSMEs are in rural areas. MSMEs in rural areas encompass a diverse range of enterprises, including manufacturing, services and trading.

Examples of Rural Startups In India

Agritech	Fasal and BigHaat - Use artificial intelligence and data analytics for providing valuable information to the farmers. Ninjacart , DeHaat and Cropin - SaaS based agritech startups which connect farmers directly with buyers/retailers/storage facilities, reducing dependence on intermediaries and ensuring fair prices.
Food Processing	Intello Labs - Add value to raw agricultural produce, create marketable products and reduce post-harvest losses. Millet Magic , Slurrp Farm and Millet Amma - Encourage farmers to shift from traditional cereals to millets.
E-commerce	Meesho - This has partnered with M/o Rural Development to sell products of SHGs under NRLM on its platform.
Edtech & Skill Development	Learning Delight , Paathshala Learning Solutions and Classle - These Ed-tech startups have been addressing rural-urban education divide by bring education in local languages to remote areas through digital platforms
Health-tech	Medyseva , Gramin Health Care and Blackfrog Technologies - Offer remote consultations and overcome the lack of healthcare infrastructure in rural areas.
Renewable Energy	AgriVijay - Provide renewable energy products for farmers and rural households like solar, biogas, electric, hydro and wind energy. Agringenium Innovations Pvt. Ltd - Harness agricultural waste for clean energy production, thereby reducing dependence on traditional energy sources.
Handicrafts and Traditional Arts	Peetal , Shilpkari and ThinkGudd - Provide training to rural artisans and help them in expanding their customer base and increasing income.
FinTech	Aye Finance , BankSathi and BharatPe - Revolutionising access to financial services offering a range of services such as investment platforms, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), digital ledger apps, and digital payment solutions.

What is The Significance of These Startups?

1. **Employment Generation**- Rural startups provide employment opportunities to rural youth who are under disguised unemployment in agricultural sector (India's agricultural sector productivity is abysmally low as it employs 50% of workforce but contribute to just 16% of GDP)

2. **Education and Skill Development**- Rural-urban divide in accessing education has been abridged by the emergence of rural ed-tech startups like Paathshaala.

3. **Promotion of Financial Inclusion-** Rural India has **bore the brunt of financial exclusion**, which has led to low levels of development. Rural fintech startups like **Bank Saathi, Bharatpe** have revolutionised the fintech sector by providing digital payment solutions.

4. **Women empowerment-** The SHG led startups like **Lijjat Papad, AMUL** have led to the socio-political and economic empowerment of rural women.

5. **Environmental Sustainability-** Rural startups have been contributing to the vision of clean and green India by focussing on **harnessing renewable energy** like **Biogas, solar** and **Wind Energy**.

What are The Challenges Faced by The Rural Startups in India?

1. **Connectivity gap with Suppliers in Urban Areas-** This connectivity gap results in **delays, increased costs**, and **logistical complexities** for rural startups and impacts their overall operational efficiency.

2. **Financial accessibility-** Rural startups face financial accessibility issues such as **reluctance of lending by financial institutions, limited availability of banking services** in rural areas.

3. **Lack of Support System-** The **absence/lack of mentorship, networking opportunities**, and **incubation centres** have impeded the growth of rural startups.

4. **Difficulty in Finding Early Adopters in Rural Areas-** The rural startups have faced issues of **limited communication channels, lower income**, and **lower digital penetration** to find early adopters in rural areas.

5. **Limited Funding Mechanism in Rural Areas-** Urban startups in **Bangalore, Delhi** and **Mumbai** have collectively accounted for **92% of startup funding over the past nine years**. Rural startups often face ignorance on the part of the **venture capitalists** and **angel investors**.

Want To Know More About Different Topics-

- [India-France Relations- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise](#)
- [India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise](#)

What are The Government Schemes ?

Atal Community Innovation Centres (under Atal Innovation Mission)	AIM's ACIC initiative was launched in 2020. The objective is to create community innovation centres for rural entrepreneurs . Till now, AIM has established 14 ACICs across the country that have cumulatively supported more than 200 community-based startups.
Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme	Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Startup Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) as a sub-scheme under the DAY-NRLM with the objective of helping the rural poor to set up enterprises at the village level in non-agricultural sectors . A total of 1,97,168 enterprises across 23 States/UTs have been supported so far.
Skill India Mission	Under this mission, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has been delivering skills to rural youths across the country for helping them setup rural enterprises .
ASPIRE	This scheme is being implemented by Ministry of MSME aims to provide training and incubation support to prospective entrepreneurs in agro-rural sector through Livelihood Business Incubators (LBIs).

What Should be The Way Forward?

- 1. Policy Support-** Focus must be on framing policies that address the unique challenges faced by rural startups such as **infrastructure gaps, access to finance, and skill development.**
- 2. Community Engagement-** The **startups led by SHGs must be promoted** through adequate policy support, as these lead to the development of local community.
- 3. Government and NGO Collaboration-** There must be a collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders to align efforts and resources for rural startup development.
- 4. Mechanism for measuring Impact-** Proper mechanisms must be established for measuring the social and economic impact of rural startups.
- 5. Sustainability instead of Scalability-** The rural startups **must not mimic the trajectory of urban startups to become unicorns.** They must aim to evolve into **sustainable employment generating enterprises,** aligning with the broader vision of Vikshit Bharat.

Fostering an environment that supports and nurtures the growth of startups, particularly in rural areas, becomes imperative for realising the USD 10 Trillion milestone by the year 2030.

Read More- [The Economic Times](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Indian Economy

Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations

Significance and Challenges Between India and France Relations, is a **time tested relationship.** India-France relations has **attracted attention in all major capitals,** from Washington to Berlin to Moscow to Beijing. The visit of **French President Emmanuel Macron** to India as the **chief guest for the Republic Day** exemplifies the natural bonds of friendship between the two countries. Earlier this year, PM Narendra Modi was the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade in France. However, the relationship also faces challenges amidst the rising geopolitical uncertainties.

Agreements Signed During the Recent Visit

- 1. Defence Industrial Roadmap-** To enable the **joint development** and production of **vital military hardware and platforms.**
- 2. Helicopters-** **Tata** and **Airbus helicopters** will partner to produce **H125 helicopters** in India.
- 3. Fighter Jets-** French engine Maker **Safran** to transfer **100% technology to build fighter jet engines** in the country.
- 4. Satellites-** India's space PSU **New Space India Limited** and **French Company Arianespace** cooperation in satellite launches.
- 5. Schengen Visa for Indian Students-** Agreement on the **activation of five year validity of Schengen visas** for Indian Students pursuing their master's degree in France.



India-France Relations

India-France share a time tested relationship. The visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India as the chief guest for the Republic Day and PM Modi's visit as the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade in France, exemplify the natural bonds of friendship between the two countries



India-France Relations

- » India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations.
- » **Post India's Independence-** Diplomatic relations were established. French aircraft like **Ouragan, Mystere**, Jaguar have been part of the Indian air fleet since 1960's. France stepped in to **supply nuclear fuel for Tarapur Plant** after US bailout.
- » **Post Cold War Era-** India and France entered into **Strategic Partnership in 1998** with defence, security and space being major areas of cooperation.



Areas of Cooperation

- » **Geo-Political Cooperation-** France was the **first P-5 country** to support **Indian membership in the UNSC**. France's support was vital in India's accession to the **Missile Technology Control Regime, Wassenaar Arrangement and Australia Group**
- » **Geo-Strategic cooperation-** Indian Air Force planes have been deployed to **Reunion Island**. France is part of **India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue** that supports free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. France with India's stand on **Pak supported cross border terrorism**.
- » **Defence and Security-** France is **India's second-largest defence supplier in 2017-2021** with Rafale, scorpene submarines. Joint exercises like **Varuna** (Naval), **Garuda** (Air Force) and **Shakti** (Army).
- » **Economic cooperation-** India-France trade **\$ 13.4 bn in 2022-23**. France is **11th largest foreign investor in India**.
- » **Energy, Climate and S&T-** France supports India's entry into **NSG**, jointly set up **ISA** with India, CNES and ISRO space collaboration on **TRISHNA satellite**, and construction of **world's largest nuclear park in Jaitapur**.



Significance

- » **Securing the Indo-Pacific-** Counter the growing Chinese aggression. For ex- **India-France Joint Strategic Vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region in 2018**.
- » **Strategic Autonomy-** Relations not constrained either by the Anglo-Saxon views (in France) nor the anti-western thoughts (In India). For ex- **France support of India after 1998 Pokhran Nuclear Test**.
- » **Global Stability-** Checking **Russia's assertiveness in Europe** and **China's assertiveness in Asia**
- » **Horizon 2047 Agreement-** Future roadmap of **India-France collaboration for the next 25 years in AI, super computing and cloud computing**.



Challenges

- » **Absence of Free Trade Agreement-** Stalled progress on the **India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment agreement (BTIA)**
- » **Trade Imbalances and IPR issues-** France exports more to India and inadequate IPR protection of French firms in India.
- » **Stalled Projects like the Jaitapur nuclear project**
- » **Differences in geopolitical approaches-** **Ukraine war stand and French stand on BRI** contrarian to India's.
- » **Emerging geopolitical scenario-** Middle east crisis



Way Forward

- » **Early Conclusion of FTA-** India- EU BTIA
- » **Implementation of Agreement on Migration & Mobility**
- » **Increased Trade and Investment via Joint Ventures**
- » **Expedition on stalled projects like Jaitapur Plant**

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What is The History of India-France Relations?

India and France have traditionally close and friendly relations.

<p>Post Independence</p>	<p>India's</p> <p>Diplomatic relations were established after India's Independence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. French aircraft and helicopters like Ouragan, Mystere, Alize, Alouette, Jaguar have been part of the Indian air fleet since 1960's. b. In 1984, France stepped in to supply nuclear fuel to Tarapur power plant after the US backed out citing domestic constraints. c. France supported India's space programme since its inception, like setting up Sriharikota launch site and Centaure and Viking rocket technologies in the 1970s.
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	However, the Cold War Constraints, did not let the development of a fully developed relationship.
Post Cold War Era	India and France entered into Strategic Partnership in 1998 . The areas of defence & security cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation constitute the principal pillars of our Strategic Partnership

What are The Areas of Co-Operation Between India and France?

1. **Geo-Political-** India and France have close geopolitical relations which has only strengthened in due course of time
 - a. France was the **first P-5 country** to support **Indian membership in the UNSC** and the reforms of the United Nations.
 - b. France's support was vital in India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (**MTCR**), Wassenaar Arrangement (**WA**) and Australia Group (**AG**).
 - c. France has got the **unique honour of being the country** that has been **invited** the **highest number of times** as chief guest for the Republic Day.
2. **Geo-Strategic-** France has been appreciative of the geostrategic concerns of India and has taken the following measures to bolster the geo-strategic cooperation.
 - a. France has offered its biggest strategic asset in the Indo-Pacific territory to India. **For Ex- Indian Air Force planes** have been deployed to **Reunion Island**.
 - b. France has also given equities in organisations such as the **Indian Ocean Commission** to India. France is also part of **India-France-Australia Trilateral Dialogue** that supports free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific
 - c. France has supported India on Jammu and Kashmir and has stood with India to **counter Pakistan-sponsored terrorism**, and has bolstered **India's capabilities** against China.
3. **Defence and Security-** India and France's Relationship in the defence and security domain has increased many folds, which are mentioned below-
 - a. France has emerged as a key defence partner for India. It has become the **second-largest defence supplier** in 2017-2021. Major Military equipments imported from France include **Rafale** and **Mirage 2000 Fighter Aircraft** and **Scorpene Submarines**.
 - b. India and France have been regularly conduct joint exercises- **Varuna** (Naval), **Garuda** (Air Force) and **Shakti** (Army).
 - c. India and France have been undertaking '**joint patrolling**' in the Indian Ocean Region and are striving towards **maritime domain awareness** in the Indian Ocean region.
4. **Economic cooperation-** India and France have a robust economic partnership.
 - a. Bilateral trade between India and France has reached a new peak at **USD 13.4 billion** in 2022-23. The exports from India have crossed **USD 7 billion**.
 - b. France is the **11th largest foreign investor in India**. The cumulative investment of France in India is USD 10.49 billion from April 2000 to December 2022.
 - c. More than **1,000 French establishments** are present in India. Their total turnover is around US\$ 20 billion and they employ around 300,000 persons.
5. **Energy and Climate-** India-France relationship is distinctly defined by the close cooperation in the fields of renewable energy to protect the Climate change.
 - a. French support played an important role in India getting an **exemption from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2008** to resume international cooperation in civil nuclear energy.
 - b. France actively **supports India's entry** in to the **NSG**.
 - c. India and France played a pivotal role in the establishment of **International Solar Alliance**.

6. **Science and Technology-** India and France share close partnership in the field of Science and Technology.

- France's CNES and India's ISRO partnership has been strengthened with the **Joint Vision for Space Cooperation in 2018**.
- India and France are collaborating on Joint Earth Observation Mission- **TRISHNA**, Joint Mars Mission and removal of space debris.
- India and France are jointly constructing the **world's largest nuclear park** in Jaitapur, Maharashtra.
- France is the first European country to accept the UPI payments system.

7. **Diaspora-** Around 109,000 of Indians, largely originating from French enclaves of **Puducherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahe** and **Chandernagore** live in France.

Also, a sizable number of Indian-origin population lives in the French Overseas Territories of **Reunion Island** (280,000), **Guadeloupe** (60,000), **Martinique** (6,000) and **Saint Martin** (300).

Want Read More Topics-

- **Economics of Animal Rearing- Explained Pointwise**
- **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 – Explained Pointwise**

What is The Significance of India-France Relations?

- Securing the Indo-Pacific-** India requires French support for maintaining the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region and to counter the growing Chinese aggression. **For ex-** India-France **Joint Strategic Vision for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region** in 2018.
- Strategic Autonomy-** The India-France relation is strategically autonomous in its truest sense, as **it is not constrained either** by the **Anglo-Saxon views** (in France) nor **the anti-western thoughts** (In India). **For ex-** France support of India after 1998 Pokhran Nuclear Test.
- Entry to Key Organisations-** France's support is crucial to India's entry into important organisations like the **UNSC** and the **NSG**.
- Global Stability-** India- France relations is crucial for checking **Russia's assertiveness in Europe** and **China's assertiveness in Asia**. This will ensure, global stability and power parity in the emerging world order.
- Horizon 2047 Agreement-** Horizon 2047 agreement between India and France lays down the future roadmap of India-France collaboration for the next 25 years. The collaboration between India and France in emerging domains such as **supercomputing, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies** holds significant importance for India's future.

What are The Challenges in India-France Relationship?

- Absence of Free Trade Agreement-** The absence of Free Trade Agreement has **impacted the deepening of India-France economic relations** (Bilateral trade between India and France is less than half of India's trade with Germany). Stalled progress on the **India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment agreement (BTIA)** has prevented further deepening of India-France relation.
- Trade Imbalances and IPR issues-** India- France economic relation is a concern for India as it suffers from trade imbalances (**France exports more to India**). Also, India has been criticized by France for **inadequate protection of intellectual property rights** (IPRs) of French businesses operating in India.
- Stalled Projects-** The India-France relations also face the challenge of non-operationalisation of the negotiated projects. **For ex- Stalled Jaitapur nuclear project.**
- Differences in geopolitical approaches-** While France has openly criticized the Russian Invasion in Ukraine, India has taken a nuanced approach. Also, **France's stand on China's BRI** contrasts with that of India.

5. **Emerging geopolitical scenario-** The Middle East disturbances like Hamas-Israel War, Chinese aggressiveness in Indian Ocean region and the chances of return of Donald Trump in the USA are the emerging geopolitical tensions in India-France relations.

Read More- [On India-French Bilateral Relations](#)

What Should be The Way Forward?

1. **Early Conclusion of FTA-** India must leverage its good relations with France and convert the **idea of India-EU BTIA into reality** at the earliest.

2. **Implementation of Agreement on Migration and Mobility-** India and France must work jointly to **increase the mobility of students, graduates, professionals and skilled workers** while strengthening their efforts to combat irregular migration.

3. **Increased Trade and Investment-** The two countries must work towards increasing bilateral trade and investment with measures like **setting up joint ventures, expanding trade agreements and promoting cross-border investment**.

4. **Expedition on stalled projects-** A joint working group must be created to expedite the completion of the stalled projects like **Jaitpur Nuclear Power Plant**.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- India's relations with major global powers

Economics of Animal Rearing- Explained Pointwise

The **economics of animal rearing** has assumed importance in India in recent times. Recently, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has taken the decision to import 40,000 doses of **Gir bull semen from Brazil** for domestic insemination to raise milk volumes. Also, the Uttarakhand Government has initiated the **genetic enhancement of Badri Cow** through sex-sorted semen and embryo transfer technology with the aim to increase its productivity. All steps point to the enhanced importance of economics of animal rearing in India.



Economics of Animal Rearing

The economics of animal rearing has assumed importance in India in recent times. Recently, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) has taken the **decision to import 40,000 doses of Gir bull semen from Brazil** for domestic insemination to raise milk volumes.

Animal Rearing and Components

- » **Animal Rearing-** Animal rearing is the process of raising animals for **meat, dairy products, eggs, fibre and leather, transport, fertilizer manure and fuel.**

Dairy industry	India ranks first . 23% of global supplies of Milk in FY 21
Poultry Industry	India ranks third . 130 bn eggs produced in FY 21.
Fisheries	India ranks second . Exports more than 40000 cr.
Meat Industry	India ranks Fifth . 6.3 million tonnes of meat

Significance

- » **Enhanced Economic contribution to India's GDP-** Livestock sector CAGR is **7.9%** during FY-15 to FY-21.
- » **Additional source of Income and Employment-** Provides employment to about **8.8% of the population** in India.
- » **Food and Nutritional Security-** Important for improving India's rank in the **Global Hunger Index**
- » **Socio-economic development-** Women make up **31% of total members** of the **190,000 in dairy producer cooperatives**
- » **Weed control-** Biological control of **bush, plants, and weeds** as cattle graze off the weeds

Challenges

- » **Productivity-** Average annual productivity of Indian is **1777 kg per animal per year** against the world average of **2699 kg per animal per year (FY 19)**
- » **Diseases-** Outbreak of **Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**, Black Quarter infection have affected livestock productivity.
- » **Feed and fodder scarcity-** Deficit of **12% green fodder, 23% dry fodder, and 30% grains-based concentrated animal feeds**
- » **Inadequate policy support-** **\$4 trillion** allocated to food and fertilizer subsidies and only **~4000 cr** for animal husbandry. (Budget 2023-24)
- » **Greenhouse gas contribution-** The animal rearing sector is a major contributor to the greenhouse gases like **Methane**, which have a very high global warming potential (GWP)
- » **Lack of marketing support-** **Absence of MSP and FCI Procurement**

Govt Initiatives

- » **Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)-** Development and conservation of **indigenous bovine breeds** for enhanced milk production.
- » **National Livestock Mission (NLM)-** Breeds improvement in **poultry, sheep, goat and piggery**, including feed and fodder development
- » **National Artificial Insemination Programme-** Novel methods of **impregnation in female breeds**
- » **National Animal Disease Control Programme-** Control of **FMD and Brucellosis**

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What is animal rearing? What are the different components of economics of animal rearing in India?

Animal Rearing- Animal rearing is the process of raising animals for **meat, dairy products, eggs, fibre and leather, transport, fertilizer manure and fuel.** Animal rearing involves the care and management of animals to ensure their enhanced productivity, health and well-being.

Animal Rearing contribution to India's economy- The contribution of animal rearing Gross Value Added (GVA at constant prices) was **30.19% of Agricultural and Allied Sector GVA** and **5.73% of Total GVA** in FY 2021-22. Animal rearing provides employment to about **20.5 million** people in India.

Livestock population in the country- As per 20th Livestock Census in the country, there are **303.76 million bovines** (cattle, buffalo, mithun and yak), **74.26 million sheep**, **148.88 million goats**, **9.06 million pigs** and about **851.81 million poultry**.

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Important components of animal rearing and their success stories

Dairy industry	India ranks first in milk production in the world. Its milk output of 221 million tonnes in 2021-22 accounted for nearly 23 per cent of global milk supplies. Milk is the country's largest agricultural commodity , surpassing rice and wheat in terms of both volumes and value of production
Poultry Industry	India ranks third in egg production. The output of eggs in 2020-21 is around 130 billion. This amounts to a per capita availability of around 95 eggs per year.
Meat Industry	India ranks 5th in terms of meat production , producing around 6.3 million tonnes of meat . Buffalo meat alone accounted for nearly two-thirds of meat products exports.
Sericulture Industry	India's Silk Industry is world's second largest after China . The total raw silk production in India was 33,739 MT in 2020-21.
Fishing Industry	India is the world's second-largest fish producer , with exports worth more than Rs 47,000 crore. Fisheries are the country's single-largest agriculture export , with a growth rate of 6 to 10 per cent in the past five years.

What is the significance of animal rearing in India?

- 1. Enhanced Economic contribution to India's GDP-** According to the ES 2022-23, the livestock sector has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **7.9%** during **2014-15 to 2020-21 (at constant prices)**. The animal rearing sector's contribution to total agriculture Gross value added (GVA) (at constant prices) has increased from **24.3% in 2014-15** to **30.1% in 2020-21**.
- 2. Additional source of Income to Farmers-** The animal rearing sector provides an additional source of income and employment to farmers. It **provides employment** to about **8.8% of the population** in India.
- 3. Food and Nutritional Security-** The enhanced production of milk, meat, egg and fish have ensured the food and nutritional security in the daily diets of the people. **For ex-** It is important for **improving India's rank in the Global Hunger Index**.
- 4. Socio-economic development-** Animal rearing sector is a major avenue for women employment. **For ex-** Women made up **31% of total members of the 190,000 in dairy producer cooperatives** in 2020-21.
- 5. Fibres-** **Wool, hair, hides, and pellets** are all components of fibre and hides (skins) made from livestock. **Leather** is the most major product with a significant export potential and is used for a variety of uses both domestically and internationally.
- 6. Weed control-** Livestock is also used for biological control of **brush, plants, and weeds** as cattle graze off the weeds.
- 7. Cultural-** Livestocks add to the cultural self-esteem when they own prized animals such as **pedigreed bulls, dogs and high yielding cows/ buffaloes**. People also use the animals like cocks, rams, bulls for competition and sports like **cock fights, ram fights and bull fights (jallikattu)**.

Read More- [Gir and Kankrej cows](#)

What are the challenges with animal rearing?

- 1. Productivity-** Animal rearing sector suffers from the challenge of animal rearing. As per Integrated Sample Survey, **average annual productivity of cattle in India during 2019-20 is 1777 kg per animal per year as against the world average of 2699 kg per animal per year during 2019**.

2. **Diseases-** There has been a surge in the prevalence of contagious diseases among animals which have detrimental effects on livestock health. **For ex-** Outbreak of **Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD)**, **Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD)**, **Black Quarter infection**.

3. **Feed and fodder scarcity-** The shortage and high cost of feed and fodder is a significant challenge to animal rearing. The Jhansi-based Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute has estimated that there is a deficit of **12% green fodder**, **23% dry fodder**, and **30% grains-based concentrated animal feeds**.

4. **Inadequate policy support-** The bulk of the agricultural subsidies by the central and state governments goes to the crops sector. **For ex-** In the 2023-24 Union Budget, **the allocation for the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying** is merely **Rs 4,328 crore** while well over **Rs 4 trillion** has been allocated to **food, fertiliser, and other agricultural subsidies**.

5. **Lack of marketing support-** Animal products lack price and marketing support that are enjoyed by the crop-based commodities in the form of **MSP** and **official state procurement by FCI**.

6. **Lack of Institutional finance-** The **share of livestock in the total agricultural credit** (short-term, medium-term and long-term) is only **around 4%**.

7. **Greenhouse gas contribution-** The animal rearing sector is a major contributor to the greenhouse gases like **Methane**, which have a very **high global warming potential (GWP)**.

8. **Lack of advancements in technology-** **Fewer artificial inseminations**, **lower-quality germplasm** and **insufficient technical staff** have inhibited the development of animal rearing.

What are the government schemes for the development of animal rearing?

Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM)	It is being implemented for development and conservation of indigenous bovine breeds since December 2014. Its aim is to enhance milk production and to make it more remunerative to the farmers.
National Livestock Mission (NLM)	National Livestock Mission (NLM) scheme has been restructured for 2021-22 to 2025-26 . The scheme focuses on entrepreneurship development and breeds improvement in poultry, sheep, goat and piggery , including feed and fodder development.
National Artificial Insemination Programme	To suggest novel methods of bringing about impregnation in female breeds and prevent the spread of certain diseases which are genital in nature.
National Cattle and Buffalo Breeding Project	To genetically upgrade important indigenous breeds on a priority basis with a focus on development and conservation.
National Animal Disease Control Programme	Implemented to control FMD and Brucellosis by completely vaccinating cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat and pig populations against Foot & Mouth Disease (FMD) and bovine female calves of 4-8 months of age against Brucellosis.
Animal Husbandry Startup Grand Challenge	To appreciate innovations coming from the villages to expand the dairy sector in India.

Want To know More Topics-

- [\[Kurukshetra January 2024\] Rural Startups – Explained Pointwise](#)
- [Indian Post Office Act 2023- Explained Pointwise](#)

What should be the way forward?

1. **Providing sufficient feed and fodder resources-** Providing **sufficient feed & fodder** and **drinking water** is the need of the hour to increase productivity of livestock rearing in India, in the rain-shadow region.
2. **Marketing-** **Trade Policies like marketing** have to be more effective for promotion of various livestock products like **egg, fish, milk** etc. and provide sufficient price to farmers by reducing influence of middlemen.
3. **Promoting indigenous breeds-** Our indigenous breed of cattle must be promoted, like the **genetic enhancement of Badri Cow**.
4. **Training-** Necessary **training and subsidies should be provided to farmers** to adopt livestock rearing as an alternate source of income.
5. **Research and development-** Government should focus on Research & Development in livestock sector to increase per livestock productivity to provide more benefits to small & marginal farmers.

Read More- [Live Mint](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Economics of animal rearing

[Kurukshetra January 2024 Summary] Drone Revolution Changing the Face of Rural India- Explained Pointwise

India is on the brink of a Drone revolution that not only stands to change the face of the rural India but also has the potential to profoundly impact and improve countless lives in rural India. **PM Narendra Modi** while inaugurating India's biggest drone expo in May 2022, highlighted the importance of drones and said, "**I want to see a drone in every farm and a phone in every hand.**"



Drone Revolution In Rural India

PM Narendra Modi while inaugurating India's biggest drone expo in May 2022, highlighted the importance of drones in rural India and said, "I want to see a drone in every farm and a phone in every hand." India is on the brink of a Drone revolution that stands to change the face of the rural India.

Drone Revolution and Examples

- » **Drone Revolution-** Increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles to address various challenges facing the country like low agricultural productivity and lapses of internal security.
- » **International Examples-**
 - a. **Africa-** Drones are being used to support small-scale farmers in Mozambique and agribusiness in Morocco.
 - b. **Japan-** Use of insect-sized drones capable of pollinating flowers by mimicking the role of bees.
 - c. **Europe-** Drones are being increasingly used in agricultural activities ranging from crop monitoring to precision farming.

Significance

- » **Increase in Agricultural Productivity-** Kisan Drones have been helping in crop and soil yield assessment, application of fertilisers and pesticides and employing the techniques of precision farming.
- » **Digitisation of Land Records-** The SVAMITVA employs drone technology to survey village land areas to provide the villagers a "record of land rights" for its use as an asset and fighting off property disputes.
- » **Rural Job Creation-** Initiatives like the NAMO Drone Didi scheme aim to train women in rural areas to become drone pilots.
- » **Fighting off water scarcity-** Use of ultra-low volume (ULV) spraying technology in agricultural drones leads to significant water savings
- » **Propelling India's economic growth-** The drone industry in India is expected to experience significant growth, reaching a turnover of Rs. 12,000-15,000 crore by 2026

Challenges

- » **Connectivity Issues-** Rural India faces the challenge of rural-urban internet divide.
- » **Weather Dependence-** Rural areas often encounter rainy and windy conditions, which considerably reduce the operational efficiency of drones
- » **Lack of Drone operation Skills-** The low knowledge and skill required for daily usage of drone technology of an average Indian farmer
- » **High cost of Specialised Drones-** The higher cost of specialised drones for agricultural use in rural areas is a major challenge
- » **Low Adoption rates in rural areas-** The adoption of drones in rural areas is very low as compared to the developed nations like the United States, where a staggering 84 per cent of farmers utilise drones on a daily or weekly basis.

Govt Initiatives

- » **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme-** There has been a substantial growth in the annual sales turnover of the drone manufacturing industry, from Rs. 60 crore in 2020-21 to over Rs. 900 crore in FY 2023-24.
- » **Drone Shakti Scheme for Startups-** This scheme targets startups within the drone industry, offering financial assistance for research and development
- » **The Drone Rules, 2021-** Comprehensive regulatory framework for drone operations within the country
- » **SMAM-** Financial assistance (subsidies to the tune of 50-80%) for the purchase of drones under the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization

What is Drone Revolution? What are the international examples of use in rural areas?

Drone Revolution- Drone Revolution refers to the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles to address various challenges facing the country like low agricultural productivity and lapses of internal security.

International Examples of drone technology revolutionising agricultural practices and boost rural economies-

- a. **Africa-** Drones are being used to support small-scale farmers in Mozambique and agribusiness in Morocco.
- b. **Japan-** Use of insect-sized drones capable of pollinating flowers by mimicking the role of bees.
- c. **Europe-** Drones are being increasingly used in agricultural activities ranging from crop monitoring to precision farming.

What are the advantages of Drone Revolution In Rural India?

- 1. Increase in Agricultural Productivity-** Use of **Kisan Drones**– a rural drone revolution- has led to an increase in agricultural productivity by helping in **crop and soil yield assessment, application of fertilisers and pesticides** and **employing the techniques of precision farming**.
- 2. Digitisation of Land Records-** The **SVAMITVA** scheme of the government aims to employ drone technology to survey village land areas to provide the villagers a **“record of land rights”** for its use as an asset and fighting off property disputes.
- 3. Rural Job Creation-** Initiatives like the **NAMO Drone Didi scheme** aim to train women in rural areas to become drone pilots. This positions them at the core of economic activity and contributes to rural prosperity.
- 4. Fighting off water scarcity-** Use of **ultra-low volume (ULV) spraying technology** in agricultural drones leads to significant water savings compared to traditional spraying methods.
- 5. Propelling India’s economic growth-** **As per projections from the Ministry of Civil Aviation**, the drone industry in India is expected to experience significant growth, reaching a **turnover of Rs. 12,000-15,000 crore by 2026**. Also, the startups related to drones have been witnessing a tremendous growth which aid to India’s vision of becoming \$5 trillion economy.

Read More- [SVAMITVA scheme](#)

What are the Challenges with the Drones in Rural India?

- 1. Connectivity Issues-** Rural India faces the challenge of **rural-urban internet divide**. Limited online coverage poses a significant challenge to the drone revolution in India.
- 2. Weather Dependence-** The weather dependence of drones for their enhanced operational efficiency also poses a significant challenge. As the rural areas often encounter **rainy and windy conditions**, the operational efficiency of drones is considerably reduced.
- 3. Lack of Drone operation Skills-** The **low knowledge and skill** required for **daily usage of drone technology** is another prominent hurdle for an average Indian farmer.
- 4. High cost of Specialised Drones-** The **higher cost of specialised drones for agricultural use in rural areas** is another major challenge for the increased use of Drones in rural India.
- 5. Low Adoption rates in rural areas-** The adoption of drones in rural areas is very low as compared to the developed nations like the **United States**, where a **staggering 84 per cent of farmers utilise drones** on a daily or weekly basis.

What are the Government Schemes for ushering in the Drone Revolution in Rural India?

Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme	The PLI scheme for drones and drone components offers incentives to manufacturers in this domain. There has been a substantial growth in the annual sales turnover of the drone manufacturing industry, from Rs. 60 crore in 2020-21 to over Rs. 900 crore in FY 2023-24 .
Scheme for Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	This scheme focuses on providing drones to women self-help groups (SHGs) engaged in agriculture. There has been an allocated outlay of Rs. 1,261 crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

Drone Shakti Scheme for Startups	This scheme targets startups within the drone industry, offering financial assistance for research and development , product development, and marketing.
The Drone Rules, 2021	These rules establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for drone operations within the country. Digital Sky Platform serves as an online registration platform for drones and drone operators.
Drones in Agricultural Research	International Crops Research Institute (ICRISAT) was granted the permission by the Indian Government to utilise drones in agri-research.
Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)	The Indian Government is also providing financial assistance (subsidies to the tune of 50-80%) for the purchase of drones under the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- 1. Training and Skill Development-** Focus must be on training the farmers for using the drone technology by themselves in their fields.
- 2. Internet Connectivity-** The Internet connectivity in rural areas must be improved by the early implementation of Schemes like **Bharat Net** and 5G connectivity.
- 3. Lower the cost of Specialised Drones-** An adequate policy must be formulated to lower the cost of specialised drones for agricultural usage. This will increase their adoption rates.
- 4. Design Weather Sturdy Drones-** Weather sturdy drones for rural areas unaffected by strong winds and inclement weather conditions must be designed at the earliest.

Given the strong government focus, regulatory backing, liberal incentives, and appropriate training programmes, Drones have the potential to revolutionise Indian agriculture, playing a pivotal role in uplifting the rural economy.

Read More- [The Times of India](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- E-technology in aid of farmers

Challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies In India- Explained Pointwise

Presently, the functioning of all of Maharashtra's 27 municipal corporations without the control of an elected body, is reflective of the challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies in India. Urban Local bodies have been hamstrung by the 4F challenge of – **Funds, Functions, Functionaries** and **Functionality**.



Challenges Faced by Urban Local Bodies in India

Presently, the functioning of **all of Maharashtra's 27 municipal corporations without the control of an elected body**, is reflective of the challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies in India. Urban Local bodies have been hamstrung by the 4F challenge of – **Funds, Functions, Functionaries and Functionality**.

Urban Local Bodies	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 74th Amendment Act,1992 forms the basis of Urban Local Bodies in India. 74th Amendment Act added Part IX -A to the constitution, which consists of provisions from Articles 243-P to 243-ZG » Significance of Urban Local Bodies Urban Planning and Development- Municipal Corporations prepare master plans to guide the development of cities. Service Delivery- Water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, street lighting & public health services Disaster and Pandemic Management- BMC at the frontline during COVID-19 outbreak management and Mumbai Floods. Empowerment of Women and Marginalized Group- Reservations for Women and marginalised Community Participation- Ward committees and public consultations help in citizen engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Funding Challenges Dependence on Central and State Transfers- ULBs dependent on state and central transfers for around 35% of their revenue Reduced Revenue raising avenues in Post-GST mechanism- Subsumption of major sources of ULBs revenue like sales tax, octroi and local entertainment taxes in the GST Incapacity in raising direct finances from the assigned taxes- ES 2018 pointed to the failure of ULBs in realising the full potential of property tax Narrow taxation powers as compared to other countries- Like Denmark (Local personal Income Tax) Lack of timely Constitution of State Finance Commission- Further a shortfall of 15% to ULB grants in 15th FC recommendations. » Functional Challenges Parastatal agencies- Creation of Urban development authorities (for building infrastructure), public corporations (water, electricity) Improper Devolution of Functions- Most States haven't devolved adequate functions to ULBs Lack of constitution of District Planning Committee- DPCs are non-functional in 9 states » Functionaries Challenges Delays in conduction of Elections to ULBs Criminalisation of the ULBs and corporator Pati Bureaucratic control and Shortage of Staff » Functionality Challenges Ensuring Planned Urbanisation Corruption and lack of coordination
Way Forward	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Constitution of Metropolitan Planning Committee- To prepare development plan, review and coordinate the plans of various local bodies. » Mechanism for Effective Financial Decentralisation- Increase tax base, Central grants by FC & timely constitution of SFC. » Conduct regular elections and Devolution of maximum functions » Strengthen citizen participation by enhancing NGO and civil society cooperation » Capacity Building exercises for ULB functionaries 	

What is the constitutional mandate and structure of Urban Local Bodies in India?

74th Amendment Act,1992 forms the basis of Urban Local Bodies in India. 74th Amendment Act added **Part IX -A** to the constitution, which consists of provisions from **Articles 243-P to 243-ZG**. It also added **12th Schedule** to the Constitution. It contains **18 functional items of Municipalities**.

Structure of Urban Local Bodies in India- The Urban Local Government in India consists of eight types of Urban local bodies.

Municipal Corporation	Mahanagar Palikas/Municipal Corporation for areas with a population of more than one million . Municipal corporations are usually found in big cities such as Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, etc.
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Municipality	Nagar Palikas/Municipal council/Municipal committee/Municipal board for areas with less than a million people . The smaller cities tend to have the provision of municipalities.
Notified Area Committee	Notified area committees are set up for the fast-developing towns and the towns lacking the basic amenities. All the members of the notified area committee are nominated by the state government .
Town Area Committee	The town area committee is found in the small towns . It has minimal authority such as street lighting, drainage roads, and conservancy.
Cantonment Board	It is usually set up for a civilian population living in the cantonment area. It is created and run by the central government .
Township	Township is another form of urban government to provide basic facilities to the staff and workers living in the colonies established near the plant. It has no elected members and is merely an extension of the bureaucratic structure .
Port Trust	Port trusts are established in the port areas such as Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata , etc. It manages and takes care of the port. It also provides basic civic amenities to the people living in that area.
Special Purpose Agency	These agencies undertake the designated activities or specific functions belonging to the municipal corporations or municipalities.

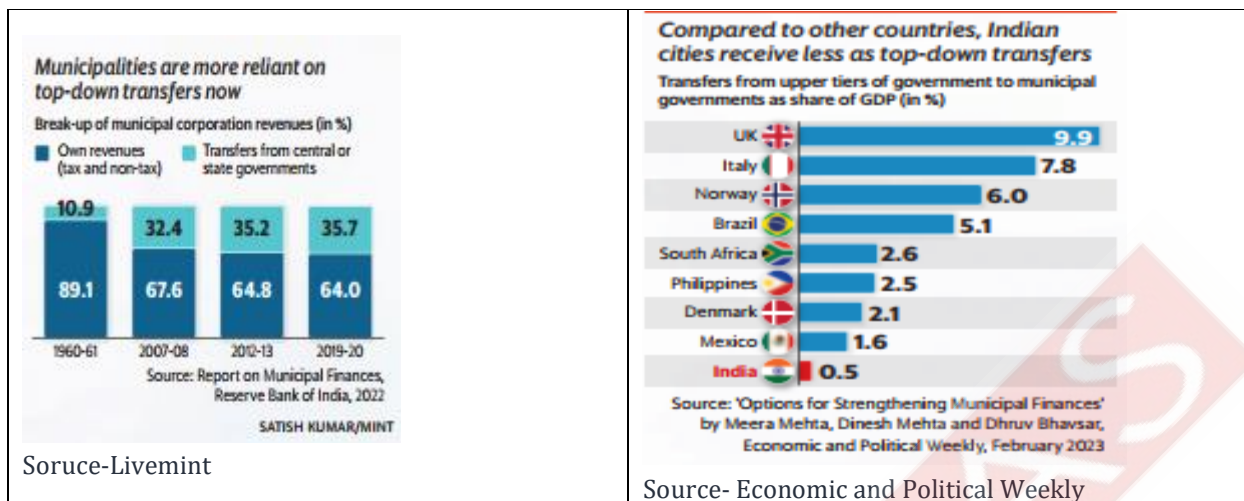
What is the significance of Urban Local Bodies in India?

- 1. Urban Planning and Development-** Urban local bodies play a crucial role in land-use planning, infrastructure development, and implementing policies that promote sustainable urban growth. **For ex- Municipal Corporations** prepare **master plans** to **guide the development of cities**.
- 2. Service Delivery-** ULBs are responsible for providing essential services to urban residents like **water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, street lighting, and public health services**.
- 3. Disaster and Pandemic Management-** ULBs are involved in developing and implementing plans to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and other emergencies at the local Level. **For Ex- BMC at the frontline during COVID-19 outbreak management and Mumbai Floods**.
- 4. Empowerment of Women and Marginalized Groups-** **Reservations for women and marginalized groups in local bodies**, as mandated by the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, have led to their increased participation in the decision-making processes.
- 5. Community Participation-** The urban local bodies is reflective of Gandhiji's dream of 'Poorna Swaraj' through 'Oceanic circle of power' and 'democratic decentralisation'. **For ex- Mechanisms such as ward committees and public consultations** help the residents to actively engage in local governance.

What are the Challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies In India?

Funding Challenges

- 1. Dependence on Central and State Transfers-** According to the RBI Report on Municipal Finances 2022, Urban Local Bodies are dependent on state and central transfers for around **35% of their revenue**. Further, the top-down transfers to the ULBs from the state and central Govt. as a percentage of GDP is extremely less in comparison with other countries.



2. **Reduced Revenue raising avenues in Post-GST mechanism-** ULBs have bore the burnt in the Post-GST era with the **subsumption of major sources of its revenue** like **sales tax, octroi (in states like Maharashtra)** and **local entertainment taxes** in the GST structure. **For Ex-** Loss of around ₹7,000 crore, or 35% of its total revenue to Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) with the subsumption of Octroi taxes in GST regime. Also, the **increase in cess and surcharges by the Central Govt**, which need not be devolved, has impacted the ULBs finances.

3. **Incapacity in raising direct finances from the assigned taxes-** The **ES 2018** has pointed out the **failure of Urban Local Bodies in realising the full potential of property tax**, which is the exclusive domain of Urban local bodies. **For Ex-** A/c to Peterson Institute of International Economics, China's ULBs raise 20-22% of finance from property taxes while Indian ULBs raise only 10-11% from property taxes.

4. **Narrow taxation powers-** ULBs in India do not have wide taxation powers as compared to other developed nations. **For ex-** **China** (ULBs major component comes from selling land use rights), **Denmark** (Local personal Income Tax), **US** (City governments can impose wide-ranging taxes).

5. **Lack of timely Constitution of State Finance Commission-** States in India have failed in timely constitution of the state finance commissions. Further, according to RBI report, there has been a **shortfall of 15% in the 15th FC recommended grants to ULBs** due to attached conditionalities.

Functional Challenges

1. **Parastatal agencies-** Various parastatal agencies created by the State government deny the local bodies their functional autonomy. **For Ex-** Creation of **Urban development authorities (for building infrastructure)**, **public corporations (water, electricity, transportation services etc)**.

2. **Improper Devolution of Functions-** The power to devolve functions to local governments rests with the State Government. **Most States have not devolved adequate functions to local government bodies.**

3. **Lack of constitution of District Planning Committee-** The 74th amendment requires a **District Planning Committee to be set up in each district**, for the consolidation and integration of development plans prepared by the panchayats and urban local bodies. According to a study by the India Development Review, **District Planning Committees are non-functional in 9 states**. Further, in states where DPCs have been created, DPCs have **failed to prepare integrated plans in 15 states**.

Functionaries Challenges

- 1. Delays in conduction of Elections to ULBs-** There have been delays in conduction of elections to the urban local bodies by the state Govt, as no constitutional provisions for ensuring elections to ULBs. **For Ex- BBMP**, the municipal corporation of Bangalore, has been **without an elected body since late 2020**. There have been regular delays in conduction of **MCD, Chennai** and **Mumbai Municipal Corporations**.
- 2. Criminalisation of the ULBs-** There has been **increasing criminalisation of ULBs** as large number of corporators having **criminal and corrupt backgrounds** getting selected to the corporations and councils.
- 3. Corporator Pati-** The real aim of political empowerment of women in urban areas has been thwarted by the emergence of **Corporator pati/Mayor Pati syndrome**.
- 4. Bureaucratic control-** Many cash rich corporations are **controlled by the municipal commissioners** appointed by the state governments and with the Mayor just being a ceremonial head.
- 5. Lack of Staff-** There is **huge shortage of skilled staff** in the Urban local bodies to carry out the designated functions entrusted to them. About **35% of posts in India's municipal corporations are vacant** (as of 2022).

Functionality Challenge

- 1. Ensuring Planned Urbanisation-** The municipal corporations have failed in comprehensively planning the holistic urban development. These have resulted in growth of **unchecked slums, traffic congestion** and **colonies without proper facilities such as schools, parks and hospitals**.
- 2. Corruption-** The Corruption scandals, like **MCD corruption in contract award**, have severely hampered the effective functionality of these bodies. Only **11 of the 35 States/Union Territories have enacted the Public Disclosure Law** that mandates publishing of key civic data.
- 3. Lack of coordination-** Poor coordination among **centre, state, and various departments at local level** lead to poor implementation of urban policies.

Read More- [On issues faced by urban local bodies](#)

What should be the way forward to improve the ULB functioning in India?

The following recommendations of the 6th ARC on Urban Governance and NITI aayog's recommendations must be implemented to ensure that the ULBs function as true instruments of local self-government in India.

6th ARC recommendations on Urban Governance

- 1. Constitution of Metropolitan Planning Committee-** The metropolitan Planning committee must be constituted to **prepare development plan, review and coordinate the plans of various local bodies** in India.
- 2. Establishment of Unified Metropolitan Transport Authority (UMTA)-** To integrate and manage **public transportation services** and improve traffic management in the region.
- 3. Strengthening of ULBs-** **Conduct regular elections**, devolve maximum functions and supplement the urban local bodies with adequate resources.
- 4. Creation of National Urban Development and Housing Fund (NUDHF)-** NUDHF must be created to provide **financial assistance to ULBs for urban development** and housing projects.
- 5. Implementation of PPP model and e-Governance-** PPP model and e-Governance like **citizen grievance redressal mechanism** must be adopted by the ULBs to enhance their transparency and accountability of functioning.

NITI Aayog's Recommendations

- 1. Improving Financial Management of ULBs-** ULBs must be provided **adequate sources to raise their revenues**. Also, there must be an increase in the central devolution of funds by the Finance Commission. State Finance Commissions should be regularly constituted with clearly defined Terms of Reference (ToR).
- 2. Capacity Building-** **Capacity building programs must be developed** for local government officials, urban planners and other stakeholders in urban governance.
- 3. Strengthening citizen participation-** **Ward committees and** other mechanisms like **NGOs and civil society organizations** must be used for strengthening citizen's participation in the ULBs functioning.

Read More- [Livemint](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS-2- Issues and Challenges with the functioning of local Self Government in India

Brain-Computer Interface- Explained Pointwise

Brain-computer Interfaces have become the talk of the town. Recently, **Elon Musk's firm Neuralink**, a company working to develop brain-computer interfaces, **placed its first device in a patient**. The Brain-computer interfaces are being touted as the next step of Human evolution.

Read More- [Elon Musk's Neuralink implants brain chip in human](#)



Brain-Computer Interfaces

Recently, **Elon Musk's firm Neuralink**, a company working to develop brain-computer interfaces, placed its first device in a patient. The Brain-computer interfaces are being touted as the **next step of Human evolution**.

Brain Computer Interfaces

- » **Brain Computer Interfaces-** Devices that create a **direct communication pathway** between a **brain's electrical activity** and an external output like a **computer or a robotic limb**
- » **Working of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)-**
 - a. **Picking up Synapses-** BCIs **place electrodes/sensors in the synaptic regions of brain** to pick up synaptic responses. **Synapses** are the **electrical signals generated by neurons** while taking any decision.
 - b. **Neural Decoding and resultant action-** The **complex synaptic data is converted into programmable understanding of the brain's intentions** by use of external devices. This lets a person turn their thoughts into actions
- » **Types of BCIs**
 - a. **Invasive BCI-** Inserted in the brain
 - b. **Non-Invasive BCI-** Wearable Devices

Challenges

- » **Risk to Patient's life-** Implantation in the brain may lead to **precipitation of seizures, infection, bleeding**.
- » **Risks of breakdown of normal neural transmission-** Chances of **breakdown of Brain-Computer implants** leading to neural damages.
- » **Ethical Concerns-** **Data Privacy, threats to human identity, creation of superhumans** with enhanced cranial capacity
- » **Accessibility and Affordability-** High costs leading to economic marginalisation like **cardiac pacemakers**
- » **Regulatory Challenges-** Involvement of multiple regulatory agencies ranging from **health to IT regulators**

Advantages

- » **Restoration of Mobility and Motor Functions-** Restoration of limb function like **Neuralink Implant for Paralysis Treatment**
- » **Treatment of Neurological Disorders-** Treatment of **Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy**
- » **Monitoring and treatment of Mental Health Disorders-** Treatment of psychiatric conditions, like **bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety**.
- » **'Mindwriting' for Non-Verbal Individuals-** Individuals suffering from **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, speech paralysis**
- » **Enhanced Cognitive Abilities-** Train their brains in memory, executive function and processing speed
- » **Ease of Living-** Information searches, e-mail administration, social media management.
- » **Avenue of Economic Growth and Future startups-** Industry expected to grow upto **\$6.2 billion by 2030**
- » **Internal Security Management-** Developing **hands-free drones** for military use

Way Forward

- » **Evolving a standard regulatory guideline-** Collaborative work of different regulators like the health and IT regulators
- » **Funding support for Medical Interfaces-** Philanthropic funding support to BCIs for **ALS, Parkinson's and paralysis**
- » **Collaborative Effort to remove the ethical challenges-** Collaboration between the **scientists, ethicists, policymakers and public**

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What are brain-computer interface? What are its different types?

Brain-Computer Interfaces- Brain-computer interfaces (BCI) are devices that create a **direct communication pathway** between a **brain's electrical activity** and an **external output** like a computer or a robotic limb. BCI is a neuro-technological intervention with its origin in 1970 at UCLA.

Working of Brain-Computer Interfaces- Brain-Computer Interfaces are all modelled after the **electrophysiology of a brain's neural network**.

Picking up Synapses

Synapses are the electrical chemical signals that spark in the gap between neurons in our nervous system when we make or think about making a decision. In order to capture these synapses, Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) place **electrodes/sensors in proximity to these synaptic regions**. BCIs work like a

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	microphone, which picks up the electrical chatter of the brain's neurons communicating with each other.
Neural Decoding and resultant action	The picked up synaptic information is fed through local computer softwares where a variety of machine learning algorithms and AI agents are employed. These convert the complex synaptic data into a programmable understanding of the brain's intentions. This is known as neural decoding . This essentially lets a person turn their thoughts into actions.

For Ex- In case of a person suffering from paralysis, the sensors of the BCIs pick up the **synaptic information for movement of limb**. This **information is then transferred** to the external device like computers or external limbs. This information is **decoded by the external devices using neural-decoding method**. The decoded information is then converted into **programmable action like movement of limbs**.

Types of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)

Invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)	Directly connected to a patient's brain tissue and are implemented through surgical procedures. Since there are major risks that come with surgery, Invasive BCIs are more appropriate for patients looking to recover from severe conditions like paralysis, injuries and neuromuscular disorders .
Non-invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs)	Not Directly connected to person's brain but involves a wearing device with electrical sensors that serve as two-way communication channels between a patient's brain and a machine. These Interfaces produce weaker signals as they are not directly connected to the brain, hence these are better suited for purposes like virtual gaming, augmented reality .

What are the Advantages of these interface?

- 1. Restoration of Mobility and Motor Functions-** This will enable them to perform basic functions like controlling their movements with their thoughts using mobile devices. This BCI Technology can be expanded to restore limb function or memory functions. **For Ex- Neuralink Implant for Paralysis Treatment.**
- 2. Treatment of Neurological Disorders-** BCIs have the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for individuals suffering from neurological disorders such as **Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy ALS, cerebral palsy, brainstem stroke.**
- 3. Curing Blindness-** BCIs hold significant importance in curing blindness cases where the visual cortex of the brain is intact.
- 4. Monitoring and treatment of Mental Health Disorders-** Brain-computer interfaces can help in treatment of psychiatric conditions, like **bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety**. They can also be helpful in preventing pedestrian conditions like **burnout and fatigue** by delivering targeted electrical stimulation to specific areas of the brain using neurofeedback techniques.
- 5. 'Mindwriting' for Non-Verbal Individuals-** The Brain-computer Interfaces can be used by individuals who suffer from **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, speech paralysis** to communicate their thoughts.
- 6. Enhanced Cognitive Abilities-** Users can train their brains in **memory, executive function and processing speed to the biofeedback** they receive from a neural implant in real time. This will allow users to **monitor their stats and self-regulate**, similar to **wearable tech apps** available today.

7. **Ease of Living-** BCIs can be integrated into our daily lives like the smartphones or laptops today to carry out searches for Information and perform complex calculations. Also, BCIs have been used as a smartphone and smart-home device interface like **dimming lights, e-mail administration, virtual assistants**.

8. **Avenue of Economic Growth and Future startups-** Brain-Computer Device Industry is a **\$1.74 billion market** that is **expected to grow to \$6.2 billion** by 2030. This also opens up avenues for startup revolution in healthcare using BCIs.

9. **Internal Security Management-** Brain-Computer Interface technology can be used to **develop hands-free drones** for military use.

What are the Challenges Associated with Brain-Computer Interface?

1. **Risk to Patient's life-** Since the invasive Brain-Computer Interfaces require **surgical implantation in the brain**, they carry risks to human lives like **precipitation of seizures, infection, bleeding, haemorrhage and damage to brain tissue**.

2. **Risks of breakdown of normal neural transmission** – The neural transmission between our brain and body parts functions like a fully coordinated, well oiled machine. However, there are **risks of breakdown of this well coordinated neural transmission network** on account of malfunctioning of the Brain-Computer Interface technology.

3. **Ethical Concerns-** The BCI technology suffers from ethical challenges like **privacy of data** related to mental health, **threat to human identity** by the blurring lines between humans and machines and **creation of superhumans with enhanced cranial capacity**.

4. **Accessibility and Affordability-** The technology carries the risk of becoming a **privilege of those who are up in the socio-economic ladder**, like in the case of use of cardiac pacemakers or artificial knees.

5. **Concerns with the trials-** There are legitimate concerns with the safety of humans and animals on whom the implant trial is being performed. **For ex- Animal rights groups have raised concerns about tests on primates by Neuralink**.

6. **Regulatory Challenges-** The Brain-computer Interface **brings together a range of fields** like implantable medical materials, safety of critical software, the Internet of Things and wearable medical devices. Hence, this would create **regulatory challenges** with the involvement of **multiple regulatory agencies ranging from health to IT regulators**.

7. **Monopolisation of Technology-** There are concerns of this technology being monopolised by firms like Neuralink. This will make the technology in accessible to many patients who cannot afford the high costs. **For ex- Oxford Astra-Zeneca Covid vaccine which was developed by public funds reached far more number of people than their private counterparts**.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Evolving a standard regulatory guideline-** A common and standard regulatory guideline must be drafted by the **collaborative work of different regulators** like the health and IT regulators.

2. **Funding support for Medical Interfaces-** **Philanthropic funding support** must be extended to the Brain-computer Interface Startups working to ease the lives of people suffering from **ALS, Parkinson's and paralysis**.

3. **Collaborative Effort to remove the ethical challenges-** There must be collaboration between the **scientists, ethicists, policymakers** and **public** to use this technology for common good and remove the ethical challenges like creation of superhumans, human identity threats.

4. **Address the concerns with the trials-** All the safety concerns associated with the trials like the safe health of primates and patients must be **addressed transparently by the BCI firms like Neuralink.**

Read More- [The Times of India](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Awareness in the fields of IT

