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1. The Big Picture

1.A Understanding Nagaland Crisis

Link: https://youtu.be/ePcGSivmrbY

Despite the presence of paramilitary troops in all sensitive pockets and Section 144 imposed in both the districts Kohima and Dimapur, the violence has continued for long now. The Home Ministry has asked the CRPF to send more troops to control law and order situation and also Assam Rifles to provide more security to the Chief Minister Mr. TR Zeliang. Protests began a few days back when Naga groups protested against Urban Local Body polls which were held recently with a provision of 33% reservation for women. Despite the Government declaring the polls null and void now the protesters have refused to back down and want the Chief Minister and his Cabinet to back down.

Reasons:

1. The agitation started because of the reservation granted to women in the election. The agitators are giving the logic that Nagaland is a special status state under Article 371-A which gives them the provision to safeguard their traditional laws. Implementation of municipal elections and women reservation would impinge upon Article 371-A of the Constitution of India according to the protesters.

2. The Nagaland Government went ahead with assembly resolution and issued notifications for elections and women’s reservations despite the mass majority appealing to the Government not to do so. This has worsened the situation further.

In the North East, tribal societies are traditionally very strong and have enjoyed supremacy in their own areas. Democracy prevails there even at the village level as the village boards are very effective. What is evident at present is a transition from male dominated society to an open society. Though, socially these societies have been very open in terms of women participation but conservatism is still there when it comes to public life. They don’t want women to look powerful. The State Government passed a law with 33% reservation for women in ULBs but did not have the courage to implement it. Now, this has become law of the land and many of the groups are finding it contradictory with their customary laws. But the demand for resignation of Chief Minister and Council of Ministers is unfair because they are doing what High Court has asked them to do. Now this law can either be renegotiated or repealed but this requires a lot of courage because the State Government might lose the credibility that they passed a law and later repealed it.

Conclusion:

Ever since the state of Nagaland came into existence in 1963, not a single woman MLA has been elected except one. The women’s body went to the court which gave an order for equality. Now, this cannot be challenged so easily by any State Government. This is an issue at the state level. A negotiation is not a one stop business but is a continuous process. The Government and people of different groups and civil society have to talk together. The failure of negotiation is the key issue in Nagaland. There are some groups which are not interested in final resolution of problems which are present in the state. These groups have to be identified and dealt with.
1B Electoral Bonds

In order to structure the political funding better and to bring transparency, the Modi Government made several provisions in the Union Budget recently. An unprecedented announcement was made introducing electoral bonds for which the Government is gearing up to amend the rules of Reserve Bank of India. The proposal has found favour generally but the plan is seen as yet another attempt by the Government to step on the turf of the RBI. The electoral bonds which will be issued by notified banks can be redeemed by recognised political parties within a prescribed time limit.

Analysis:

Electoral bonds are more to do with eliminating black money and less to do with electoral reforms. The Government already took a step in the Budget that the political parties cannot take cash of more than Rs.2000 from a particular donor. This will go a long way in ensuring electoral reforms. The identity of the donor will not be disclosed if there is use of electoral bond which in case of cheque payment gets fully disclosed showing which companies and industrial houses are supporting a particular political party even if the funding is legitimate.

Even if there are electoral bonds, there is no limitation on giving cash to the political parties. At present also, the amount being paid as donation is shown less than the amount being actually given to the political parties. Since the money will come through banks, so to some extent black money will be reduced. But as far as corruption is concerned, it is still difficult to put a check with this step. Rather than having political funding, government funding can be a better tool to curb corruption which is followed in many countries of the world. However, in a country like India, this might lead to further problems when already Government has expenditures on other serious issues like poverty, unemployment etc.

In order to bring electoral bonds, RBI Act will have to be amended because right now under the law only RBI can issue these bonds. After this the banks designated by RBI to issue these bonds will come into picture. These will be short duration bonds which means that they will have to be encashed within a period of 30 or 45 days as suggested by the Finance Minister. The scheme is left at the discretion of political parties or companies which means that it does not really addresses the issue of political funding. There is nothing in the scheme that will encourage the companies or industrial houses to buy these bonds by payment of cheques and political parties to take those bonds.

Way Ahead:

1. If the country is moving towards digitization, even the Rs.2000 which can be paid in cash to the political parties should be paid online.
2. If all the transactions and accounts being done and used by political parties are regulated under a piece of legislation, it might prove to be more effective and simple. There are many political parties at present which do not file the return every year.
3. Setting aside the election of such candidates against whom there are evidences of spending black money or excluding them from future elections as penalty can be a strong measure.
4. Voters have to be made aware through awareness campaigns as often illiterate voters are bribed for votes before elections.

These measures if taken into consideration seriously along with the will to control illicit funding in elections, some changes can be expected in future.
2. AIR Spotlight Summary

2.A India–UAE Bilateral Relations

Introduction

The crown prince of United Arab Emirates Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan was the chief guest for the Republic day celebration. India has been reaching out to the countries of Middle East and UAE promises to be one alliance that is going to reap benefits for India. This is a very important move in the Indian government’s initiative to have closer relations with West Asia.

India-UAE Bilateral Relations

- The visit of Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan follows the visit undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August 2015. UAE is a very important area and strategically very significant. The rapid exchange of visits, conversations and dialogue between the top leaders of India and UAE is a welcome development.
- Among various MOUs signed the important one is the Bilateral relationship is now upgraded to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and even signed defence MOUs. Maritime cooperation was mentioned as one of the potential areas of cooperation. India is looking forward for defence ties with many countries and UAE is one among them.

Bilateral Defence Ties

- UAE has been identified by India as a key partner in the very volatile region and an important region because of India’s energy imports and large segment of India’s Diaspora lives there. So India is trying to expand and enhance its partnership and defence ties.
- Security has not been a significant aspect of our relationship so far with countries in West Asia. The countries in Middle East have also started feeling anxious because of the rise and expansion of Islamic State. Therefore India is developing security and defence ties with UAE.
- Both countries held bilateral exercises between Indian Air Force (IAF) and United Arab Emirates Air Force (UAE AF) called Desert Eagle II.
- During the Republic day parade an armed forces contingent of around 200 soldiers from the UAE took part in the parade. This is a new trend which started last year when the French President was here. This is display of India’s generosity of welcoming our chief guest and is part of India’s soft power. They act as a bonding between the services of the two countries and send a positive message to people. They are an important element in strengthening and expanding our partnership with these countries.

Pakistan and the Middle East countries

- Traditionally UAE was regarded as an ally of Pakistan, now UAE is making public statements and gestures which indicate that it might leave that traditional spot and develop closer ties with India. It is clear to everyone that Pakistan has emerged and evolved as the epicentre of terrorism. There is funding and training for terrorist groups in Pakistan. Internationally wherever any terror attack takes place there is always the role of Pakistan. For UAE terrorism is a challenge that they need to confront with and for that they find India to be an effective partner.
- When it comes to Kashmir issue we find that India usually does not get the support it would be looking at from Middle East nations because of the Islamic bondage they have with Pakistan. It is difficult to change the view points
at the multilateral level in the organisations like Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). On a bilateral level we can expect a greater support for the Indian position on Kashmir issue.

**Economic Ties**

- India is a large country, large economy and a large market. With the international economy going down over the last few years all these countries are looking for big markets and also big destination for their energy exports and India is an excellent candidate in this regard.
- During Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s successful visit to UAE in 2015, UAE promised to invest $75 billion into infrastructure development in India. The pace seems to be little slow, but we may see the realistic results on the ground very soon. There is huge sovereign wealth fund in UAE of more than $800 billion. India needs $1.5 trillion of investment over the next 5 years to improve our infrastructure.

**Indian Diaspora in UAE**

- According to the latest figures the remittances which the Indian Diaspora in UAE send back to India is around $13.6 billion which helps India to tackle its Current Account Deficit. Indian Diaspora is the important representatives of India and they act as a strong and binding factor between the two countries. There are about 2.6 million Indian Diaspora in UAE which accounts for 12% of the total Diaspora. They are making huge contribution towards economic prosperity, stability and success of UAE.

### 2.B Different Aspects and Scope of Aadhaar

**Introduction**

Aadhaar is Government of India’s one of the most successful ICT project. It was launched in 2010 and in 2017 it has achieved a big landmark. The enrolment has crossed 111 crore out of the total population of 125 crore. Nearly 90% of the citizens have a unique ID number. It is very important because all the government facilities are being linked to Aadhaar card.

**Need for Aadhaar**

- The concept behind Aadhaar is to provide a digital, unique, and non duplicable biometric identity to every resident of the country. Aadhaar also provides a platform to authenticate his or her identity online anytime.
- Various studies have shown that approximately 60 to 70 percent of people did not have any credible identity and it resulted into deprivation of availing any government or private service. So Aadhaar was started to address the problem of identity. The whole process of enrolment is made simple so that everyone can enrol easily. Because of simplicity and convenience 90% of citizens have registered in a short span of time.
- Aadhaar is a permanent identity: it does not change or expire unlike the Passport or Driving License which expires after certain time period. This identity will be acceptable all across the country. According to RBI guidelines a person can open a bank account in different place other than the place of his origin through his Aadhaar card and necessary documents. A person can change his address in the Aadhaar card when he/she moves to another city or a state.

**Aadhaar Data security**

- Aadhaar does not collect the data about the nature of transactions or the details about the person’s income. It does not collect the details about the person’s profession, religion, assets etc. It is a misconception that Aadhaar collects all these data. It collects only the basic demographic data like name, age, address and the biometric data. Therefore the risk of breaching of data or data insecurity is not relevant.
The income tax departments will collect data regarding the person’s income, the bank has the details about the person’s transaction and these details are not taken by Aadhaar. So Aadhaar is not the aggregator of all the data and people have misconception about this.

- **Aadhaar is for the residents of India and the resident is the one who has lived in India for the last 182 days.** The resident of India could be of two categories. He could be the citizen of India or could be the citizen of a foreign country who is residing in India. **Aadhaar does not go into verification of citizenship.** It has mentioned in the Aadhaar Act that someone having an Aadhaar card is not entitled with any citizenship right of this country.

- So far the government has spent around 7700 crores of rupees on the whole project which includes enrolling more than 111 crore people and an online Authentication infrastructure. **The Aadhaar enrolment infrastructure is one of the largest in the world.**

**Uses of Aadhaar system**

- Aadhaar is being used by many agencies both within and outside the government under the provisions of Aadhaar Act for providing various services. Aadhaar as a digital identity can help in financial inclusion and also provides banking services to those who do not have a bank account. Establishing brick and mortar or physical bank branches in every village is not economically viable. So the approach was to appoint a business correspondent who will have an ATM attached with Aadhaar Enabled Payment System. The whole system of banking transactions like withdrawal and deposit of money can be done. Today there are more than 1,65,000 business correspondents going to villages and doing these transactions.

- In the last 4 years more than 33 crore transactions have taken place and everyday more than 15 Lakh transactions are taking place through Aadhaar Enabled Payment System.

### 2.C Launch of India Post Payment Bank

**Introduction**

- The Government of India has launched the first postal payment bank which is an important part of the financial ecosystem in the country. Payment bank is a very good option for the people for online transactions. This segment will have low money deposit, low money transfer but high number of transactions. Down the line if there are focused players who can provide these services, it will ease people for doing their transactions. The other payment banks which have been provided licenses are Airtel and Paytm.

- People are aware that having a bank account is very important. The government through Jan Dhan accounts have offered attractive insurance cover. There has been a huge awareness campaign being created in the rural areas that it is important to have a bank account. With the Demonetisation move people have understood the necessity of having a bank account.

**Usefulness of Payment Banks**

- The existing bank branches are not present in remote areas; various geographical areas have no presence of public sector banks. If payment banks like post office which have large network come into banking segment it will encourage financial participation in remote areas, provide ease in the transactions and better services to the customers.

- An individual can hold a deposit of maximum 1 lakh rupees and payment banks cannot give loans to anyone. This is one factor which reduces the risk of payment banks. We have seen that cooperative and regional rural bank are not very well regulated and there have been cases where the cooperative banks have failed and customers have lost their money. In payment banks there are no such risks for the customers.
There will be large number of transactions in quantity but in terms of value it won’t be significant. **Payment banks is like a service industry offering services though mobile and digital platform. It is a low cost banking solution where transaction costs will be lower along with low infrastructure cost and low compliance cost.**

- The services which payment banks offer are attractive that it bill payments, government’s direct benefit transfers, digital wallet facilities etc. It is the **ease of doing transactions and ease of reach and familiarity** are the benefits which payment banks provide.

**Post office Payment Bank**

- The road map disclosed by post office is that they will have 650 post office payment branches across the country. **Post offices have a very large network. There are around 1,54,000 point of services from the post offices.** There have been good relations between the post man and the rural masses. Many accounts already exist like **National Saving certificates and small savings account** and people are familiar with the operations. This gives a big impetus to India post payment bank.

- **Post offices offer three types of accounts.** They are **Safal** which is a regular account with basic banking transactions in a lower quantum of money. **Sugam** and **Saral** accounts which are for those people who do not have banking experience and used for transactions alone with limited facilities.

- Indian post offices have 35 crore customers and lave 1.54 lakh point of services. It is well capitalised company where 400 crore is being provided by the government as a guarantee and 400 crore provided by Department of posts and services.

- With Ujjwala scheme and DBT government is proving direct money transfer to the account of the beneficiary which has made people to open bank accounts. The post office payment bank will be in a good position to provide banking transactions.

- Competition is always healthy. It brings the efficiency in the system. The Indian population is around 125 crore whereas there are only 1.25 lakh bank branches. So there is ample scope for competition to provide services in remote areas.

- **The post offices will also provide online services in the form of NEFT, IMPS, AEPS and UPI.** There is scope for large transactions in payment banks in these entire segments. **Large banks can perform bigger roles of providing loans, accepting large deposits and cater to large quantity customers and the payment banks can cater to small customers.**

### 2.D Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan

**Introduction**

- The union cabinet has approved **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** to make 6 crore rural household digitally literate. According to **Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER)** survey, if mobile penetration increases by 10% then the GDP would increase by 1.2%. If broadband connection increases by 10% then the increase in the GDP would by be 2.7%. If all the government services are provided through mobile phones then the GDP would increase by 3.2%.

- So this is a very ambitious scheme announced by the government but what needs to be done is the infrastructure has to be greatly improved to bring optical fibre to each Gram panchayat and have last mile connectivity through wireless broadband connectivity to people’s smart phones. The outlay for this project is Rs.2,351.38 crore to usher in digital literacy in rural India by March, 2019.
• Digitally literate persons would be able to operate computers/digital access devices (like tablets, smart phones, etc.), send and receive emails, browse internet, access Government Services, search for information, undertaking cashless transactions, etc. and hence use IT to actively participate in the process of nation building.

**Concerns / Challenges**

• At present India’s infrastructure is not at the stage at which we can reap the benefits of the Information and Communication Technology. According to World Economic Forum’s Annual Network Readiness Index which assess the information and the communication capability of 140 nations, in 2013 India was at 68th position but in 2016 India has slipped to 91st. We need to step up our efforts to bring in optical fibre connectivity to each gram panchayat and also increase the 4G coverage in all villages. Regional language content has been developed in the government records in a user friendly manner.

• The major problem in the digital transactions is the **security and the privacy**. People need to be trained on how to protect their financial information.

• The **authentication solely based on biometrics as in Aadhaar Enabled Payment System(AEPS) is insecure** and there is lot of scope for cyber crime. Well educated people and technically sound people are also falling prey to the cyber criminals. It will be very difficult for the rural masses who have to first understand the technologies and procedure to keep their information secure.

**Need of the Hour**

• **India needs at least 1.5 million cyber security professionals each year** if we have to make the digital transactions secure. There has to be **international standards like ISO** for payment initiations, security transactions, Asset transactions etc. The ISO has series from 27001 to 27004 for keeping information secure by organisations. Many of the banks have not yet adhered to these kinds of international standards.

• At the time when the nation is moving towards digital payments it is necessary to train people especially the rural household.

• After demonetisation drive people are getting fraudulent calls and messages. The banks have to take the responsibility to educate their customers regarding fraudulent emails and messages.

• The **private sector must also adhere to these standards. The regulator for the digital transactions has to be setup** to look at the responsibilities and the liabilities for fraudulent transactions.

• The government has started one more scheme named DISHA to make people digitally literate. The government provides 100% reimbursement if we train someone from SC / ST, BPL category, Anganwadi and Asha worker; and 75% for OBC and General category.

• The **mobile applications have to be made very secure**. The apps can exchange information with other apps and thereby become vulnerable. The OTP is not encrypted, so anyone can intercept the OTP and complete the transaction.

• Private sector institutions and financial institutions have taken part in the digital literacy and educating the customers. This has to be extended to every individual who has a bank account. People try to ignore these practices because it is the **ease of use vs ease of security**. The more secure the transaction the more difficult it becomes to carry it out.
2.E  Unnecessary Stent Implants

Introduction

- Several senior cardiologists in India have raised concern over the rise in the cases of unnecessary implant of stents in India. They say if an audit of stent implant cases was done, over a third of the elective procedures could turn out to be needless.
- It depends on the patient also like where he goes to treat his heart diseases. If he chooses an academic hospital which is run by the government or semi government organisation he would face a different list of charges. If you go to hospitals in the private sector they have lots of overheads and they have their own charges and the patient pays for the procedure and the comfort he gets in the hospital also.
- A few years ago in the US, studies had found that only half the non-emergency cardiac stenting procedures were appropriate. In the same study the patients insist on angioplasty because they have a feeling that angioplasty will improve their long-term survival.

Stenting in India

- There is no regulation of hospitals in India, especially in the private sector where a majority of urban Indians seek healthcare. At least 25-30% of the stenting done in this country is inappropriate. There are cases of stents being used in absolutely normal patients.
- In our country the major gap is in the counselling which the doctor provides. Normally the patients go by the doctor's advice. In the absence of any monitoring, patients in India have no protection from unnecessary use of stent.
- In the last 5 years the implant of stenting in India has increased by 5 times. There is not only a boom in the domestic market, bust also foreign patients are coming to India as part of medical tourism to get stenting done because the cost of stenting in India is low. This is because there is increased awareness, increased diagnosis, increased availability of the angiograms and increased availability of doctors.

Concerns / challenges

- In India there are instances where angioplasty is done for patients having chest pain due to Vitamin D deficiency which is wrong.
- The bypass is done by the surgeon and the stenting is done by the cardiologists. The poor victim of the heart attack or the Coronary artery disease lands up with cardiologist. It is the integrity, honesty and the righteousness of the cardiologists to decide whether the patient really needs stenting or not.
- The stents are very costly. There is no regulation and the Drug Controller is not capable of regulating domestic stent manufacturers. There have been cases where the stent manufacturers have been found making stents in garages.
- In India the coronary artery disease is seen in young age, people do not exercise, do not have adequate sleep, do not have stress free life and do not eat balanced diet to keep their coronaries healthy.

Providing guidelines for Stenting

- Dr Devi Shetty, chairman of Narayana Health says that a significant percentage of angioplasties are inappropriate. The Cardiology Society of India should bring out guidelines which the public can access and decide whether stenting or open heart surgery is required. He also said Cardiology Society of India should create a mechanism to audit themselves rather than giving a chance for an external body to be created. Such an audit is needed as society has lost trust in doctors because of such inappropriate use.
- It would be difficult to audit during an emergency with acute heart attack with very low chances of surviving if the intervention is not done. Despite making guidelines there can be aberrations. So making guidelines is not the solution. We have to follow the footsteps of our elders like B.C Roy. Loosing reputation at the cost of earning money should not be the part of medical treatment.

**Way Forward**

- **We have to treat the accompanying illnesses; stenting alone is not the answer to the problem.** Normally patients have diabetes and hyper tension which has to be controlled and treated simultaneously. Then we can have the optimal benefit of stenting.
- Everyone is not doing this profession as a service; people are in the service to make money. The best way is that decision has to be taken in the best interest of the patients and go for stenting if it is required.

### 2.F General Anti Avoidance rule (GAAR) and its Advantages

**Introduction**

General Anti Avoidance rule (GAAR) is a set of rules or a framework which helps the revenue authorities decides whether a particular transaction has commercial substance or not. If it does not have commercial substance and is not a genuine transaction then what should be the tax liability associated with it.

**Why GAAR is necessary?**

- **GAAR was originally proposed in Direct Tax Code of 2009** and was postponed for implementing it. GAAR is a set of rules that helps tax authorities decide whether a commercial entity has entered into an arrangement with another entity or a subsidiary of it to avoid paying taxes to the government. The entities take the advantages of the loopholes present in the tax structure. GAAR is different from tax evasion or tax mitigation which are illegal activates.
- **GAAR will address those cases which are technically not illegal but those cases which are not ethical.**
- There has been a study done by different organisations like PWC which has identified how countries have implemented GAAR from a very long time like Australia implemented GAAR in 1981, China and Germany in 2008.

**Importance of GAAR**

- The objectives of any tax laws are to promote or incentivise real investments. GAAR will allow the government to raise more revenue. It empowers the revenue authorities to generate more revenue from all those transactions which are not paying their taxes.
- The government has been very focused on the fiscal deficit and is implementing fiscal consolidation plan and has been able to bring the fiscal deficit from 3.9% to 3.5%. The tax revenues of both direct and indirect taxes have shown buoyancy. Through the Income Disclosure Scheme or Demonetisation there has been a continuous aim at increasing tax revenues and direct them towards the welfare schemes. The entire GAAR activity would also enhance the tax revenue of the government which further adds to lower the fiscal deficit.
- GAAR helps in bringing competitive advantages to several businesses that have been doing genuine transactions against those businesses that have been misusing the loopholes of the tax structure. Thereby it creates a better business environment for the people to recognise that the state exists for the purpose of bringing genuine investments. This will help towards ease of doing business and would recognise India as a serious country promoting free and fair trade practices rather than providing free tax advantages.
- Globally there has been a low growth rate and the economies have recovered from the global financial crisis and they are still not able to reach the levels of expectations. There have been accommodative monetary policies, expansionary fiscal policy and protectionism in the global scenario. However India has been showing very encouraging results of 7.1% growth rate which more than China’s growth rate. So it may be the right time to implement GAAR in India.

**Interpretation of GAAR provisions**

- Since GAAR gives more powers to the revenue authorities, people were concerned about the wider and the arbitrary interpretations the revenue authorities may have regarding the GAAR provisions. Many of the committees have been trying to address the difficulties the tax payers may face in case the GAAR provisions are implemented. So all the committees have tried to see that GAAR provisions are implemented in such a manner that they do not allow arbitrary interpretations that lead to harassment of the tax payers.
- There have been developments with specific anti avoidance regulations and together with GAAR it would help the tax authorities to plug the loopholes which people have been using to avoid taxes.
- GAAR will be implemented from 1st April, 2017 and the government has considered the minimum threshold where the GAAR provisions can be implemented. The genuineness of the transactions remains intact and only covers those transactions which have been taking an advantage of the loopholes present and the small tax players will not to be harassed.

**Cases of Tax Avoidance**

- For example the government gives a fiscal incentive of a tax holiday in an SEZ unit. A company set up a factory in an SEZ with defunct machineries and do not produce anything here and produce somewhere else and show it as the produce at the SEZ unit and take a tax holiday. This is a case of tax avoidance. There are other cases where certain companies are based in low taxed jurisdictions and by evoking double taxation treaty they pay lower taxes like in Mauritius and Singapore.
- In another case suppose there is only a registered office in the low tax jurisdiction like Mauritius or Singapore which does not perform any particular work and all the activities are performed in different country say in India. By this there is no beneficial work happening in Mauritius or Singapore and taking the advantage of the tax laws. In this case the tax has to be paid where the actual work or business is being performed.

### 2.G Reforms in funding to Political Parties

**Introduction**

The government has embarked on a new exercise to stop corruption in the political funding which a bane of Indian electoral system. Nearly 70% to 80% of the funds to the political parties are never reported and they are collected from unknown sources. The government has decided to bring in greater transparency in funding of political parties. These include capping cash funding by a single anonymous donor to 2000 from the earlier limit of 20,000 and proposing electoral bonds. This demand for capping cash funding by an anonymous donor was also made by the Election Commission recently. This is a step in the right direction, which does not solve the problem completely but partially.

**Transparency in Political Funding**

- This is the first time the government has acknowledged that there is non-transparency of political funding. Transparent method of political funding is vital for the system of free and fair elections and even
after 70 years of independence the country has not been able to evolve transparent funding to political parties.

- Like we expect the vegetable vendor and the auto driver to accept payments digitally the same should be followed by political parties. The corruption in political funding is against the moral and ethical principles.

**Supreme Court Guidelines on Electoral Reforms**

- Supreme Court had raised the issue of irresponsible promises made by the political parties in the **manifestos**. Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to call the political parties and discuss a way out. The guidelines that there should be responsible promises in the manifesto were included in the Model Code of Conduct.

- In 2002 Supreme Court had said that every candidate while filing his nomination papers has to file an affidavit giving the details of his financial assets and also regarding the criminal cases pending against him. Most of the electoral reforms have come through the Supreme Court which is a sign of judicial activism.

**Further Steps in Electoral Reforms**

- The next step could be that **every rupee donated to political parties should be accounted through digital transactions.**

- **State funding of elections** have been discussed several times and several committees have recommended and the most talked about committee is the **Indrajit Gupta Committee** of 1999. It said the state funding to elections will be feasible when there is internal democracy with the political parties. The report pitched for the need to devise appropriate framework for regulation of political parties before state funding of elections is attempted.

- There should be state funding of political parties based on their performance not state funding of elections. Say for every vote the political party is given Rs 100, so that the total amount will be more than the money the political parties have raised through corruption and dubious means.

- Donating to a **National Electoral Fund** and the details of the donors will be kept secret. By donating to the National Electoral Fund, it will be like donating to the nation and not to any political party. **From this fund the money can be distributed to the political parties based on their performance and the percentage of votes they obtain so that there will be complete transparency. There can be tax benefit for those who donate to the fund.**

**Concerns / Challenges**

- This move of reducing the limit to Rs 2000 will raise the paper work for the political parties to claim that the funds are from the unknown sources. The political parties may convert the huge funds they receive into single donations of Rs 1990 which leads to more paper work. **Therefore it does not solve the problem entirely.**

- The state funding of elections is difficult to monitor because for the Vidhan Sabha elections the limit is 28 Lakhs but the political parties spend in crores. The 28 Lakh provided by the state will go subsidised with the black money used by the political parties.

- The government has proposed ‘electoral bonds’ where identity of the donor will not be known to the receiver. This can be counterproductive because the details of the donor will not be secret from the government and the government will be privy to the information. So it is like the government control over the political parties.
3. Rajya Sabha TV

3.A India’s World – Fallout of US leaving TPP

Link: https://youtu.be/D06mQBBG2vA

US President Donald Trump has formally withdrawn America from the Trans Pacific Partnership, a flagship trade deal with 11 countries in the Pacific rim. With the US opting out of the TPP, the only remaining countries in the trade deal are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico Peru, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. TPP was the world’s largest trade deal agreement involving 12 nations accounting for about 40% of the world’s economy. The TPP was expected to eliminate more than 98% of tariffs in the region. Beyond market access, the TPP was to create a single set of trade and investment rules among its member countries making it easier and simpler for them to trade in the region. TPP was one of Mr. Barack Obama’s signature efforts. It was aimed at increasing America’s influence in Asia and check China’s military and economic ambitions.

Analysis:

There was a lot of criticism about the secrecy with which TPP was being negotiated. Nothing was made public. There were mounting concerns regarding job losses in US, exports being made to the country, US firms investing in other countries.

Some sections of the Democratic Party and organized workers and labour groups had opposed the fast track authority very fiercely when it was first granted and the administration of Barack Obama had to reach across the isle to the Republicans to get that fast track authority because within the Democratic Party there were so many opponents. Though the issue was opposed right from the beginning, it gathered momentum because of Presidential elections in the pipeline as majority opinion was heard. After the financial crisis that hit the US economy from which it has still to recover in a robust manner, people were filled with a sense of insecurity and rising inequality was also a reason for that.

Activism and outward looking policies, there is an inward looking attitude from Trump. America’s influence in the world will not be affected much as long as NATO is there. Strategically, TPP’s failure might reinforce doubts about American credibility in the region amid a rising China. TPP signatories Malaysia and Vietnam, have been signaling that the agreement is essentially dead without the US, whose inclusion was the reason why the agreement which initially began as a pact between just four countries, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore had importance.

US can take advantage of the asymmetric power distribution much more through bilateral negotiations and in the past, their trade negotiations with both Japan and South Korea conducted by USTR (United States Trade Representatives) have been extremely fierce and eventually they did get compromises both in terms of market openings in these countries in the sectors which were not sufficiently open to the US and also in terms of getting more investments from these countries in the US rather than export so that job creation can be done in US.

Many countries are interested in taking China as a member of TPP. From India’s point of view any arrangement that has China and not US might end up unbalanced as it will have to be aware of Chinese hegemony. Therefore, US was required by nation like Indonesia and India as a balance. RCEP is supposed to slow down. China is very much in presence for many countries as it is the largest trading partner for most of them.

Conclusion:

For India, US opting out of TPP is good because it would have made India’s exports less competitive as it slashed tariffs and gave countries like Vietnam and Malaysia preferential access to markets in the United States and Japan. TPP was
3.B Security Scan- Satellites and National Security

Link: [https://youtu.be/Mfn6CzNAAX8](https://youtu.be/Mfn6CzNAAX8)

On 15th February 2017, ISRO established a world record when it successfully launched as many as 104 satellites from a single rocket. ISRO has done the country proud and needs to be commended for the profile and credibility it has acquired and that too in a very cost effective manner. The world’s first satellite was launched in October 1957; 60 years ago by former USSR which was Sputnik I. In early 1958, the United States responded by launching Explorer I and the space race had thus begun.

Analysis:

Given the linkages between rocket technology and missiles on one hand and the relevance of satellite surveillance in nurturing strategic deterrence, India is relatively a new entrant to the space domain. The first Indian satellite Aryabhata was launched with Soviet assistance in 1975. ISRO has made impressive strides in a relatively short period overcoming many challenges and technology denial regimes. Globally, the United States has invested about 40 billion US dollars in the space sector, China 6 billion, Russia 5 billion, Japan under 4 billion and India has spent just about 1.2 billion dollars till date. Currently the total number of operation satellites worldwide are under 1550 and this includes 104 satellites launched by ISRO recently. The United States leads the global satellite ladder with the total of 576 of which 146 are used for military purposes. Today satellites are an integral part of communication, development and national security spectrum and India has prioritized the space sector in its overall national endeavor. The world record was earlier held by Russia when they had put 37 satellites in space till India’s record on 15th February 2017 on a single launch. Most of the satellites weighed between 4-10 kgs.

Achievements of ISRO:

The [Cartosat-2 series satellite](https://youtu.be/Mfn6CzNAAX8) is the primary satellite carried by PSLV-C37. This satellite is similar to the earlier four satellites of the Cartosat-2 series. After its injection into a 505 km polar Sun Synchronous Orbit by PSLV-C37, the satellite was brought to operational configuration following which it began providing regular remote sensing services using its Panchromatic and Multi-spectral cameras. The imageries from Cartosat-2 series satellite will be useful for cartographic applications, urban and rural applications, coastal land use and regulation, utility management like road network monitoring, water distribution, creation of land use maps, change detection to bring out geographical and manmade features and various other Land Information System (LIS) and Geographical Information System (GIS) applications. It is supposed to give pictures with resolution less than a metre and has the capability of monitoring what activities are happening across the borders by India’s hostile neighbours. Change detection will be possible with those images.

Post 1991 Gulf War, people have understood the importance of satellite technology for military capability. **Satellites are important at three levels; navigation, communication and remote sensing.** Cartosat-1 had only one satellite and Cartosat-2 series has got 5 satellites now. After one more satellite, India will move to Cartosat-3 series. GPS has been used very effectively in war strategies. Right from movement of aircrafts to ships and also for weapon delivery, accurate navigational inputs are required. As far as communication is concerned, satellites are supposed to be the best communication systems available at present as it is very difficult to breach such communication. **INSAT satellites have been very effective here.**
In June 2010, there was a proposal to set up an Integrated Space Cell with a view to optimize the use of satellite capability of the country for military use. For multiband military communication, satellites like GSAT-7 or INSAT 4F were launched in 2013 dedicated to Indian Navy. NAVIC is navigation satellite series which gives a very high accuracy for real time positioning. There is a whole range of satellites for earth imaging capabilities in any weather condition. The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission is a joint project between NASA and ISRO to co-develop and launch a dual frequency synthetic aperture radar satellite. The satellite will be the first radar imaging satellite to use dual frequency and it is planned to be used for remote sensing to observe and understand natural processes of the earth. The RISAT series are the first all-weather earth observation satellites from ISRO.

ISRO is a public funded organization. It does not need to pay any dividend to shareholders. Western countries have private players involved where they need to pay dividends to the shareholders. This causes rise in cost of those countries drastically. The ecosystem in India is of low cost as compared to western countries such as the payments given to the scientists. The projects are carried out in ISRO in a holistic manner which further reduces cost.

However, management of space in space is becoming a very difficult issue. Space debris has been a talked about issue. It is not only about satellites because when it is launched, the remaining portions of rockets also remain and revolve around. The Kessler syndrome is a scenario in which the density of objects in low Earth orbit (LEO) is high enough that collisions between objects could cause a cascade where each collision generates space debris that increases the likelihood of further collisions. There are some mechanisms which are there and have been accepted globally. Though these are not legally binding but are being followed as space debris mitigation guideline. Space situational awareness mechanism is important which will require satellites, navigation system and telescopes to club all the data together which will help to know the exact movement of the debris. Right now, US has a mechanism like this and they on an open source provide this data to everybody.

**Conclusion:**

Surveillance and intelligence gathering is an integral part of military capability. In the emerging technology driven kind of warfare that is coming up, it is expected that different countries will invest in space cyber continuum to enhance their national security capabilities in a holistic manner. India has a complex and contested security challenge and the space sector offers some opportunities to maximize existing competence and arrive at innovative options. The ISRO success story has a large scope to move towards launch of heavy satellites in the next phase apart from investing in human resources and national ecosystem will help in moving India forward in space.
4. Lok Sabha TV


Link: https://youtu.be/6hic78zmT3U

The Economic Survey 2016-17 has been recently released which says that the economic growth will return to normal as new currency notes in required quantity have come into circulation and follow-up action on demonetization has been taken. It also says that the Rupee performed better than the currencies of most the emerging market economies. The presentation of the survey has been different this time because it is for a period of 10 months instead of 12 months. This time the Budget came on 1st February instead of 31st March. All the parameters which have been taken into consideration is for the period April to November. There are some major pointers on how reforms in the economy are taking place.

Key Takeaways:

1. Economic growth is expected to return to normal
2. GDP growth for 2017-18 pegged at 6.75-7.5%
3. GDP growth for 2016-17- 7.1%
4. New currency notes in required quantities have come back into circulation.
5. Demonetization to affect growth rate by 0.25 to 0.5%
6. GST and other structural reforms are expected to take the trend growth rate from 8-10%. Fiscal gains from GST will take time to realize
7. Inflation remained stable in current fiscal year to around 5%
8. Rupee performed better than other emerging market economies.
9. Fixed Investment to GDP ratio is expected to be 26.6% in 2016-17.
10. Growth in indirect taxes- 26.9% during April-November 2016
11. Demonetization may affect supplies of certain agricultural products.
12. Decline in imports - 7.4% to US$ 275.4 billion.
13. Trade deficit declined to US$ 76.5 billion
14. Industrial sector growth rate moderate to 5.2% in 2016-17 from 7.4% last fiscal.
15. Infrastructure supportive industries registered a cumulative growth of 4.9%

Analysis:

The Economic Survey has favoured the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an alternate to the various social welfare schemes in an effort to reduce poverty. It also supports demonetization. This will increase bureaucratic efficiency and give rise to GDP as subsidies will be done away with. The cultivation area for Rabi crops have gone up which is the reason for growth in agriculture. There is also a growth in the core industries by 4.9% but the fact is only the data from April to November have been considered here.

Trade deficit has declined and exports have grown marginally. If the trade deficit goes down, it signals that Rupee is becoming stable. In 2013, Rupee fell significantly because the long term debt and short term debt had gone up phenomenally which has come down at present from 33% to 16.8% approximately.
When GST comes, large number of indirect taxes which will be combined into one. There will be less burden on tax payers and tax collectors also as more efficiency comes in. The revenue losses which occurred during demonetization are expected to be covered through GST.

The ability of the corporates to invest and the stress on the banking sector are two major areas to stress upon. Since the NPAs are rising, bank credits are not coming in the industrial segment. Private investment is not taking place in the economy. Banks now have to be recapitalized in a way so that credit off take starts from there. Fiscal deficit is in control and therefore, Government needs to kick start investment.

Despite having Schemes like Start Up India and Stand Up India Make in India etc, growth in employment has not been significant. Migration for work and education is also accelerating. Focus needs to be towards labour-intensive sectors such as apparel and leather and skill development of labourers.

Conclusion:

Fast remonetization and free convertibility of cash to deposits including early elimination of withdrawal limits would reduce the GDP growth deceleration and cash hoarding. Continued impetus to digitalization ensuring that this transition is gradual, inclusive, based on incentives and maintaining a balance between cash versus digitalization would help further. Lastly, an improved tax system will promote greater income declaration and do away with the fears of over-zealous tax administration.

4.B Public Forum: All about Steel

Link: https://youtu.be/c3vNqPr-ixg

Steel plays a major role in the growth of the developing economy. In India, it is valued at over 100 billion dollars and contributes around 2% of the GDP of the country. India has become the third largest producer of steel with 89 million tonnes of production overtaking US in 2015 after China and Japan. There was a decline in global consumption of steel largely in steel producing nations like China, Japan, US, Russia in 2015 whereas India saw a growth of 4.5% in comparison with the previous year. However, steel sector in our country is in doldrums and needs serious reforms.

Analysis:

The steel sector and allied industries employ 6 lakh people directly and 13 lakh indirectly. Until 2 years ago India was also the third largest consumer of finished steel in the world. The country has been importing total finished steel every year since 2007-08 with the exception of 2013. Besides this, India also remains world’s largest producer of direct reduced iron or sponge iron. With the economy largely focusing on growth of infrastructure and construction sector, the consumption and demand of steel is set to grow. The sector has been adversely impacted by global steel glut which led to predatory pricing and a surge in steel imports in recent years. This has also led to flooding of domestic market with cheap import from China, Korea and Japan impacting sales and profits. To address majority of these concerns and create a globally competitive steel industry, the Government has come up with a new steel policy.

Developing production capacities within the country and outside the country by Indian companies are two key issues here. For domestic production there are companies like SAIL, Tata Steel and others. Demand for steel in India has been good in the past few years but the effect of demonetization is still not known. Real estate, construction and cars are one of the major consumers of steel and these sectors are affected by demonetization. Revival in these sectors will take some time.
External factors are operating at various layers and various sectors. The demand of steel is down globally due to which in China that is the largest producer, the steel companies are in great trouble. **Some of them are closing down and selling off. Some of them are also selling at a discounted and distressed price due to which Indian steel makers are finding it difficult to sell in the same nations where China is undercutting them.** China is also undercutting imports and exports to India because of which the domestic steel producers find it difficult to sell even domestically at a good price. **Though anti dumping duty is imposed still the Indian industries are not as competitive as Chinese imports.** A country as a part of global economy where steel is a decontrolled sector; these problems do arise and have to be negotiated.

India is well placed to produce more steel and different kinds of steel both in terms of raw material availability and close proximity to the countries which produce coke such as Australia. India can be a net exporter of steel of all kinds if there is better research and development. **It has to strategise its raw materials like iron ore and coke carefully with steel production units. These two materials constitute about 75% of the cost of total steel production.** Some of the raw materials in abundance are suddenly in short supplies like the Goa Iron Ore Mines were shut down by the Supreme Court order, Karnataka mines are facing huge problems and in Odisha there are capacity constraints on mine production imposed. India produces metallurgical coke but the quality of it is poor and has high ash content not suitable to the technology deployed. Setting up of washeries by organizations by Coal India is a must which should be done. These washeries can be easily subsidized to be set up rather than importing coke.

**Conclusion:**

There needs to be an independent body rather than Government as a regulator for steel industry where there are players from both private and public sector. Government should look at policy issues while implementation and day to day issues should be looked up by an independent regulator covering all the inputs and outputs of steel industry.

### 4.C Education – Improving Accessibility

Link: [https://youtu.be/iGFBLFj-Ea0](https://youtu.be/iGFBLFj-Ea0)

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality. Education is a key to enhance India’s competitiveness in the global economy. **India’s tertiary education system is considered one of the largest in the world with over 30 million students.** The scope of education needs to be expanded specially at the higher level. Several steps in this direction in last one decade one of them being the **National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) which was initiated in 2003 by seven IITs** in Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur, Kharagpur, Roorkee, Guwahati and Madras along with IISc Bangalore under the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Under NPTEL, a series of web and video courses are offered to students in various disciplines of engineering, basic sciences, management and humanities. Currently more than 1000 such courses are available on the NPTEL portal for free.

India’s population is expected to cross 1.35 billion by 2020. By then, the average age of an Indian citizen would be around 29 years. The three Ds often talked about are demography, demand and democracy in this regard. Demographically it is an advantage to be a young nation but meeting the demands of the young population is a huge challenge and for democracy to prosper, India needs revolutionary solutions to meet the emerging demands. Therefore, development is required at present. To achieve it, the very basic premise of an educated society has to be fulfilled first. Technology advancement and its rapid infusion over the past few years gives India a real hope. **The MOOCs or Massive Open Online Courses have the potential to take India from an under educated to a wholly educated society.**
Key Challenges and Achievements:

1. The gross enrollment ratio in higher education in India is only one third of what is found in developed countries. The ways to achieve this are starting large number of institutions but this is not easy because even if institutions are set up, it is not known whether the faculty will be qualified enough or not to guide the students. The other way is to use the online platform where some of the best faculties can address and reach a large number of students in remote and rural areas of the country as well.

2. SWAYAM builds upon the experience of NPTEL. It is covering a vast number of subjects while NPTEL has focused on engineering. SWAYAM offers transfer of credits which means that if a certain course is taken on it and completed successfully, some credit is earned by the student.

3. There are universities which have academic councils to officially approve that an online course offered by NPTEL or SWAYAM can be taken for credits by students affiliated to that particular university. If there is such a rule in every university, this might help in greater enrolment of students. Further, it will provide good students of some lesser known university to have access to lectures of some good faculties which otherwise is not possible.

4. There is also a language barrier present as many students are not comfortable only in english. Therefore, for every course available under SWAYAM or NPTEL can be translated into some of the different languages or there can be subtitles if the main discourse is in english. Quality education in other languages is important.

5. Placement linkage is an area of concern. It happens in premier institutions in a well coordinated manner. There is a need for synchronization between what is taught and what is required in the market in other institutions as well. In technical education, AICTE is working on modules which will help in improving skill set which is required by the market. All universities have to focus in this area and in other streams also.

6. The work done so far has been good but there is a need for NPTEL or SWAYAM to have greater coordination with local colleges so that the content created is accessible much easily to the students because it often happens that internet connectivity in small towns and cities is not that good.

7. In online education, a learner who is being addressed is not known therefore, clearing doubts is not easy. It is not known whether the student is receiving what is being delivered or not.

Conclusion:

These lectures are being delivered to the country so they need to have certain quality standards. Many local universities think that online education is like distant education which is not the case. It is a source of direct learning as rich and effective as classroom learning. There might be operational challenges in accomplishing the dream of education accessibility for all but with better co-ordination among Government, premier institutions and local colleges, it can be achieved.


Link: [https://youtu.be/OXYhR7uLqBs](https://youtu.be/OXYhR7uLqBs)

India's first National Women’s Parliamentarian Conference was recently held at Amravati, the new capital of Andhra Pradesh. The three-day conference which was the first of its kind was organized by Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly. The theme of the Conference was “Empowering Women-Strengthening Democracy”. The vision of this Parliament is to provide a politically neutral platform to women belonging to diverse backgrounds to share their knowledge and research in the area of social, economic and political empowerment of women.
Analysis:

The prime objective of NWP is to eradicate discriminations against women, to create equal opportunities to them and connect around 10,000 higher secondary school girls with eminent women personalities of India and overseas. It is to make young girls realize their potential and to enable them to take leadership roles in all sectors of life while sensitizing the society about issues like malnutrition among women and children, sexual harassment and sanitation among others. The National Women’s Parliament will declare Amravati Declaration for women empowerment in the country which will become a benchmark for all the states which have to implement those guidelines for women empowerment.

India is one of the most successful democracies in the world over the last few decades. However, there exists a large gap between the delivery and expectation level to which women should have reached in terms of representation in diverse fields. Women still do not have power to exercise their choice in life due to the patriarchal dominance in the society. NWP is a welcome step because it tries to address issues related to women through face to face discussions. For example- recently there was a violent uprising in Nagaland where the tribal councils dominated by males opposed 33% reservation of females in urban local bodies. If Amravati Declaration is adopted by states in future, women might be able to assert their rights to some extent.

Expected Outcomes:

1. A structured and vibrant network of women representatives and aspiring girl student leaders across the nation.
2. Increased access of girl students to women leaders who have made their mark in various walks of life.
3. Generation of new ideas, concepts, theories and ideologies pertaining to women empowerment.
4. Helping to ignite and strengthening the sense of social responsibility among women of India.
5. Documentation of the views of experts and experienced speakers on women empowerment which can be used for policy making process.

As far as South Asian nations are concerned, India had visionary leaders who provided voting rights to women at a time when most of the countries of the world were unable to do so. India has examples of women who have reached to the top position in different fields. Sri Lanka had a female President. A favorable society and favorable political circumstances are important to a certain extent in order to make these steps being taken for women successful. The financial committees or defence services in India have negligible women participation. A representation in Parliament does not assure that the glass ceiling will be broken. Women also have an onus upon themselves to exploit the opportunities they get at higher positions.

4.E Public Forum : India’s Oil Strategy

Link: https://youtu.be/EPFHszQtpa0

India is one of the major oil consumers in the world. It depends on imports to meet 80% of its oil needs largely from OPEC’s production. India’s energy import bill is close to 150 billion dollars and may double by 2030. According to International Energy Agency, India’s demand for oil is also expected to expand to 10 million barrels per day by 2040 that means India may become the fastest growing crude oil consumers in the world in the next 23 years. The Union Cabinet has approved awarding 31 newly discovered small oil and gas fields in its first auction in 6 years. The idea is to entrust more of these blocks to new entrants in order to boost local production. According to the Director General of hydrocarbons, the awarded blocks will boost India’s oil output by as much as 15000 barrels of oil per day and gas production by 2 million standard cubic metres a day. Development of small oil and gas field is crucial for Prime Minister
Narendra Modi’s plan to reduce oil imports by as much as 10% by 2022 and thereby, making further reduction of such imports to half by 2030.

Analysis:

It is believed that India’s oil demand growth will outpace that of China. Its domestic demand may grow by 0.4 million barrels a day this year and by 0.2 to 0.3 million barrels a day next year. Whereas China on one hand has taken advantage of the fall in international oil prices and went ahead with the massive stock piling plan, India on the other hand has not done much to improve its oil storage capacity due to political indifference. US also invested hugely in oil resources. Since India buys oil from international market at the last minute at the time of crisis, it further adds to volatility in prices.

The Finance Minister in his budget speech this year said that the Government wants to create an integrated public sector oil major as part of the PSE reforms in order to match the performance of international and domestic private sector oil and gas companies. The merger if done will make it a bigger and broader asset base. This will attract more investment. It will give the oil sector the financial muscle to take up huge capacities of drilling and storage which is very important as India has very little storage capacity. Piping capacities within the country is also less. This will also help to curb the oil volatility in terms of pricing and availability.

ONGC is a producer, MRPL is a refiner, HPCL has good marketing strategies therefore, if they are merged together, there will be an integrated supply chain. Companies functioning in bits and pieces will not be able to compete globally. This idea was presented a decade ago. India is not geologically endowed with oil resources to meet its requirements. There is no method of development at present that is independent of energy sector. Skill, technology and resources are required to match with the global competition. Indian companies as compared to global companies of US, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia etc are very small. Therefore, merger is important.

Tank farms for storage of oil near ports might be beneficial because it will lead to quick storage and will not take years to create those storage. A good connectivity to major consuming centres through pipelines is also required for both strategic and commercial storage.

Conclusion:

Oil is likely to remain a critical source of energy at least in the near future. Even the carbon footprint is much lesser with the use of oil as compared to coal. It is not only the OPEC countries but the huge trading cartel also formed by the global banks and by companies like BP and Shell which have a big role to play in volatility of oil prices. Therefore, India needs to have its own energy security and storage system. Apart from oil, India also needs to look into its gas reserves because it is the most eco-friendly source of energy among fossil fuels.

4.F Public Forum: Poisoned Air

Link: https://youtu.be/yH-1FV9YBVE

Air pollution has touched alarming levels in recent years. China and India, two of the world’s most populous countries have the most polluted air in the world. According to some international researches, half of the world’s air pollution deaths occur in China and India. Whereas deaths linked to air pollution in China have been steady in recent years, the rate has increased in India where smog readings in major cities has been more than safe exposure levels regularly. It is horrifying to note that air pollution kills two people in India every minute and some of the worst polluted cities are in India. The risks are physical and economical. Air pollution is one of the deadliest form of pollution as it a major reason for premature deaths across the world.
Issues Concerning India:

The National Air Quality Index was launched by the Government last year as an official reporting standard for air pollution levels that would allow for comparisons across cities. In 2015, Delhi alone was found to have pollution levels 12 times higher than the WHO guidelines. While another six cities Lucknow, Faridabad, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Agra and Varanasi had pollution levels at least ten times higher than the permissible levels. Delhi Government tried to improve the air quality of the city by regulating the number of cars on the streets. WHO’s Report in 2016 on Ambient Air Pollution levels indicated that Delhi’s air had high levels of particulate matter measuring 10 microns or less which made it the most polluted cities in the world second only to Riyadh. The burning of agricultural waste in states like Punjab and Haryana, vehicular emissions, dust from construction sites and factory emissions further aggravate the problem.

It is high time for the Government and the civil society to take action on the sources of pollution. Majority of deaths in India are due to indoor air pollution as well which is caused by solid fuel burning, animal dung, fuel wood, crop waste and so on. Economic growth will help in overcoming this issue to some extent such as the steps being taken by the Government to provide LPG to poor households. Crop burning and biomass burning are largely an outcome of policy failures and distortions which need to be rectified. For example- paddy is not grown in ecologically stressed areas like Punjab and Haryana.

As far as industries are concerned, the problems in India comes from small and medium enterprises sector which are largely outside the reach of monitoring and enforcement agencies compared to large industries and it is very difficult to ensure that they are compliant to the rules and regulations concerning environment as they are large in number and spread all over the country. The technology they use is generally outdated, the fuel being used by them is often very polluted and they do not have financial support to upgrade their technologies. Enforcement of rules is much more stringent in China. The sources of pollution in China is largely attributed to industries in cities. Particular meteorological conditions which prevail especially during winters also lead to high concentration of pollutants are also responsible for air pollution.

Conclusion:

India has a long way to go but it has to get its priorities right. The first is to look at the issue of indoor fuel burning as this will have a social impact specially on women and children of rural and semi-urban areas and the second is to address the issue through political dialogue among stakeholders for better policies and their implementation.

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