Several Indian states have recognised the IT sector as a catalyst for economic growth, improve governance and public service delivery. The subnational governments recently have increased their budgets for IT-related activities. The recent rise in demand for IT services has been from local governments for digitalisation of records, online cash transfer of subsidies, scholarships, and so on. The IT policies at the state level offer a conducive business environment and additional fiscal incentives to promote a healthy competitive ecosystem. Shifting IT activities to tier II and tier III cities has the potential of boosting the local economy through employment and income generation.

Number of IT related patents registered by Indian companies during the 15-year period has remained relatively low. Uneven performance of firms across states has affected the R&D activities. Indian electronics industry has failed to keep pace with countries like China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.

India is yet to see its own corporate IT product company like the size of Google, Yahoo, Facebook, SAP, WhatsApp, or Adobe. The government has failed to help establish ITES-related firms in rural areas despite the fact that there exists potential demand in rural India as well. Additional policy support is needed for the states that have lagged behind in the IT sector.

Domestic market has largely remained unexploited by the IT industry. India is yet to have any policy that can accelerate the diffusion of ICT to different sectors of the economy. In the eventuality of an economic crisis—as it happened in the US and EU, the Indian IT industry’s external demand would be jeopardised. Heavy dependence on a few countries is not a pragmatic business model, particularly when the US and EU markets have been reluctant to outsource more work to other countries.

The increased threat to cyber security due to cloud computing and digital payments. Fast-growing competition from Philippines, China, and Costa Rica. The success of Government initiatives would be based on constant innovation, improving the IT infrastructure, and removing legal and administrative bottlenecks.

Several state-promoted technical and other professional institutes of higher learning contributed by introducing relevant courses in their curricula. FDI policies adopted in the early 1990s and special economic zones (SEZs) incentivised the IT industry. The deregulation of the telecom sector gave a big boost to the IT revolution in India.

The global financial crisis in 2007–08 had an adverse impact on the Indian IT industry. The Indian IT sector is still viewed as a preferred destination by major MNCs.

In India, the state has assumed the role of facilitator and active promoter of the IT industry through initiation of several policies. The removal of state controls and export incentives led the Indian exporters to explore business opportunities in new markets outside India.

The IT industry also cashed in on several government-initiated projects such as networking of government offices, modernisation of telecom infrastructure, Aadhaar, and e-governance. The IT/ITES industry will play a vital role in the programmes such as Make-in-India, Stand-up India, Digital India, and Smart City Mission.

During the past six decades, the central government has provided fiscal concessions such as tax holidays and reduction in excise duty and import duty to promote the IT sector. State policies on data security, prevention of piracy, content regulation, and cyber crimes have also been framed from time to time. PPP model has been encouraged for greater foreign and domestic investment, faster technology transfer, and improvement in efficiency.

New Industrial Policy of 1991, tax-free and fiscally-incentivised SEZs and National Manufacturing Investment Zones have been recognised as important measures.
Several Indian states have recognised the IT sector as a catalyst for economic growth, improve governance and public service delivery.

The national governments recently have increased their budgets for IT-related activities.

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Neglect of electronic hardware manufacturing.

Too much emphasis on low-end IT services.

Saturation in select cities and neglect of other urban and rural areas.

Excessive dependence on the export market.

National-level IT Policy Initiatives

Role of Union and State Governments in the Growth of IT Sector

Challenges

Introduction

IT industry has earned a distinction of being one of the few “achieving” sectors in India during the post-reforms period.

This sector has emerged as a globally competitive industry, especially in information technology-enabled services (ITES).

It has generated large-scale employment opportunities, encouraged innovation, and has remained largely non-polluting.

With the economic reforms in early 1990s, India’s position as the preferred destination for IT in the world had been established.

India entered the global IT market by capitalising on the demand for low-cost but high-quality programming skills.

The establishment of a series of software technology parks (STPs) across several cities in India during the 1990s (and beyond) was an exemplary initiative of the state.

Several state-promoted technical and other professional institutes of higher learning contributed by introducing relevant courses in their curricula.

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New Industrial Policy of 1991, tax-free and fiscally-incentivised SEZs and National Manufacturing Investment Zones have been recognised as important measures.
Developed countries must ensure trust in the process (under the Paris Agreement) and follow the previous decisions (under the Kyoto Protocol) to reduce their carbon emissions.

Acts of developed countries on their pre-2020 commitments are the "foundation upon which climate action should be built after the year 2020".

The group - Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) - also demanded that the developed countries must increase their ambition to reduce their carbon footprints.

Ratification of the Kyoto Protocol (2013-2020 period) by developed countries to ensure mitigation under the UNFCCC.

UN secretary general Antonio Guterres has stressed on the need to mobilize the agreed $100 billion annually for developing countries.

Developing countries should also pledge more mitigation action.

India stands on the cusp of an energy revolution.

Last year the country added 11.3 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy capacity.

Some of India's largest states, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are pitching to use renewables to power their growth.

The Indian Railways is planning a future based on greater energy efficiency.

Small and medium sized enterprises are championing for a cleaner future.

Khadi handloom sector is looking to replace power looms with solar-run systems.

Recycled plastic is used in road construction and cement factories, reducing thousands of tonnes in emissions.

These commitments are a testament to India's resolve to be a strong leader on climate action.

Limiting greenhouse gas emissions will interfere India's growth.

India still relies on coal to generate 59% of its power.

Over 300 million people in India are still without electricity.

The outcome of climate negotiations potentially has the power to steer the trajectory of India's development.

We must leave for our future generations a climate wherein they can breathe clean air and have a healthy life.

The Emissions Gap Report 2017 finds that pledges to reduce current emissions are only about one-third of what is needed to prevent catastrophic temperature increases.

The wealthy nations have failed to deliver on short-term climate commitments.

Under the terms of the UN's climate convention, the action before 2020 falls mainly on wealthy countries historically responsible for the rapid rise of greenhouse gases.

The US, EU, Canada, Japan and other developed countries have refused to put climate assessments before 2020.

Developed countries have not ratified the decision that they had taken five years ago in Doha.

Wealthy nations still haven't explained how they plan to fulfill their pledge to provide $100 billion to poorer countries.

Trust and good faith being eroded by developed nations by moving away from prior agreements and Paris treaty obligations.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said in an alarming report that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has hit its highest level in 800,000 years.

With one degree of warming so far, the planet has already seen an increase in drought, deadly heatwaves and superstorms.

US decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement has made the post-2020 task quite difficult.

The Paris agreement set out principles, but not the details and rules.

The world's small islands have more to lose from climate change than anywhere else on Earth.

In many instances, developing countries have not put policies in place to give investors confidence to finance projects.

India also has a large coastline, and anthropogenic climate change and the resultant rise in sea levels will directly affect its citizens.
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Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person’s intake of energy and/or nutrients. One is ‘undernutrition’—which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies. The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer).

India is in 100th position among 119 countries in the 2017 Global Hunger Index. The malnutrition rate (among children below five years) is 38.4 per cent according to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4). This is because of poor diet, poor healthcare and poor sanitation. For very young children, only about one in 10 meet diet adequacy (NFHS 4).

Such deficiencies take a toll not only on an individual’s health but also on the economy and society at large, as the productivity declines and the cost incurred on healthcare increases. Poor nutrition affects early childhood development, learning and earning potential with life-cycle effects on national health and economic growth.

India has the highest levels of malnutrition and the highest number of stunted children in the world. The pace of decline of under nutrition is far below what numerous countries with similar growth trajectories to India have achieved.

India pays an income penalty of 5% to 10% due to a workforce that was stunted during their childhood. Boosting nutrition levels across the country is one of the biggest low hanging fruit in the Indian public policy sphere. Need for more research on increasing the efficiency of public distribution system.

States and communities must focus on improved outcomes for the poor and accountability for those in governance. Creation of web-enabled Nutrition Information System, which should be synergised with the health information management system and mother and child-tracking system. A food and nutrition commission should be established, headed by the prime minister. According to M S Swaminathan, to promote nutrient value food production, a multi-pronged strategy involving academic institutions, government, scientists and farmers should be evolved.

NITI Aayog launched National Nutrition Strategy aimed at Kuposhan Mukt Bharat - linked to Swachh Bharat and Swasth Bharat. It intends at bringing nutrition to centre-stage of National Development Agenda. It lays down roadmap for targeted action to address India’s nutritional needs.

Focus on the most vulnerable and critical age groups. Assist in achieving the targets identified as part of the SDGs related to nutrition and health.

National Nutrition Mission, similar to the National Health Mission. Integration of nutrition-related interventions across sectors like women and child development, health, food and public distribution, sanitation, drinking water, and rural development.

A decentralised approach will be promoted with greater flexibility and decision making at the state, district and local levels. This is to enable decentralised planning and local innovation along with accountability for nutrition outcomes.


Supplementary nutritional support during pregnancy and lactation. Health and nutrition counselling. Adequate consumption of iodised salt and screening of severe anaemia. Institutional childbirth, lactation management and improved post-natal care. Convergence of state and district implementation plans for ICDS, NHM and Swachh Bharat. Focus on the most vulnerable communities in districts with the highest levels of child malnutrition. Service delivery models based on evidence of impact.
Only about 10 per cent of agricultural produce is processed in the country, leading to a lot of wastage.

As per an estimate, around 40 percent of total food production is wasted due to the inadequate facilities for transportation, storage, processing and marketing.

Food processing industry related infrastructure are not sufficient to meet the growing needs of the sector.

The sector has been facing a resource crunch.

Lack of a comprehensive policy addressing the various needs of the food processing industry is obstructing its growth.

Focus on farmer producer organizations and women entrepreneurs to connect them to corporates.

Private sector should invest more in contract farming, raw material sourcing and creation of agri-linkages.

Aerated drinks manufacturers should consider blending 5% fruit juice in their products as fruit juice-based drinks are an intrinsic part of the Indian food habits.

Need for a ‘nutrition-rich and climate-smart crops’-based venture.

Link India’s potential to the world’s requirements, link Indian traditions with the future of mankind and connect India’s farmers with markets around the world.

Each State and district must identify at least one food product for specialisation.

Take the Dairy sector to the next level by increasing the production levels of multiple products based on milk.

Development of untapped areas, such as ornamental fisheries and trout farming.

The combination of traditional Indian food, with modern technology, processing and packaging, can help the world discover the health benefits of traditional foods.

A well-developed food processing sector helps reduction of wastage, improves value addition, promotes crop diversification, ensures a better return to the farmers, promotes employment and increase export earnings.

If it were to be summed up in one line, add investments, subtract the worries, multiply the growth so that India can divide the opportunity among investors, consumers and the farmers.

World Food India 2017 (WFI) was organized recently by Ministry of Food Processing Industries in New Delhi.

The theme of WFI 2017 is ‘Transforming the Food Economy’.

The event’s objective is to strengthen India’s position as a Global Food Factory and make the country ‘food secure’.

India is expected to attract an investment of $10 billion in food processing sector and generate 1 million jobs in the next 3 years.

Food Processing can transform the country’s food economy and realize the vision of doubling of farmers’ income.

There are huge opportunities for global supermarket chains that consider India as a major outsourcing hub.

There are opportunities in post-harvest management such as primary processing and storage, preservation infrastructure, cold chain and refrigerated transportation.

Immense potential for value-addition, especially in organic and fortified foods.

Increasing urbanisation and a growing middle class creates demand for wholesome, processed food.

Over a million passengers that have a meal on train in India every single day is a potential customer for the food processing industry.

India ranks sixth in production and export of honey, and India is now ripe for a ‘sweet revolution’.

Food Regulatory Portal for effective and transparent implementation of the food safety laws in the country.

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana, aims to create world class food processing infrastructure, benefit two million farmers and generate more than half a million jobs over the next three years.”

100 per cent FDI for trading, including via e-commerce, of food products manufactured in India.

Loans to food and agro-based processing units, and cold chains, are classified under priority sector lending.

Mega Food Parks Scheme to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers.

Scheme of Cold Chain, Value Addition and Preservation Infrastructure.
Ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) is a medical intervention to improve the nutrition intake of children suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM).

RUTF is a packaged paste of peanuts, oil, sugar, vitamins, milk powder and mineral supplements.

The paste is given to children aged between six months and six years, usually after a doctor’s prescription.

The concept of therapeutic food has long been a subject of debate in India with its varying food habits and high incidence of malnutrition.

SAM is defined by a very low weight for height, by visible severe wasting, or by the presence of nutritional oedema.

About two thirds of these children live in Asia and almost one third live in Africa.

It is a major cause of death in children under 5, and its prevention and treatment are critical to child survival and development.

The Global Hunger Index report 2017 put India at number 100 in a list of 119 countries.

The National Family Health Survey-4 found 35.7% children aged less than five years were underweight, and 38.4% were stunted.

Therefore the need for combating malnutrition is evident.

UNICEF supports community-based management along with RUTF.

UNICEF report observed that if properly used, “RUTF is safe, cost-effective, and has saved hundreds of thousands of children’s lives.”

The report said RUTF contains all nutrients needed for the recovery of such SAM children.

This makes it a practical solution where cooking facilities and fuel are limited.

Internationally over 2 million SAM children are treated across the globe using the RUTF.

RUTF is a nutrition innovation that allows SAM to be treated outside the hospitals and medical facilities.

In line with the aims of the Make in India, Indian RUTF manufacturers are at par with the international quality standards specified by UNICEF and WHO.

Project POSHAN, implemented by National Health Mission in 2015-16, Rajasthan, treated 9,640 children with over 80% recovering from SAM
The tax reductions will, however, result in a revenue loss of about Rs 20,000 crore a year.

The cement is retained in the 28% GST bracket. This is disappointing as cement is integral for Housing for All, Swachh Bharat and building of other infrastructure projects.

Cars and white goods, which have become a basic necessity for the most of Indians these days, continue to attract the highest tax rate.

Tweaking GST so many times within a span of four months certainly exposes the unpreparedness of the government.

GST Network portal has not been functioning effectively.

They have done little to address the basic design flaws with the GST regime.

Non-inclusion of petroleum, real estate and alcohol, as well as the large number of items taxed at 0 percent continues.

Frequent and piecemeal changes with rates create procedural cost and business uncertainty.

The rate cut would require the retailers to pass on the benefits to the consumers.

Tackle the rigours of compliance that big and small businesses faced.

Gradually 28 per cent slab should be brought to 18 per cent.

There should be more simplification of the return filing process.

Inclusion of real estate and electricity under GST must be the future reform.

Whatever other improvements the GST needs must be implemented at the earliest.

Support merchants and customers involved in digital transactions with certain incentives so as to discourage cash payments and promote a less cash economy.

Political dominance should be reduced, and outside experts should be involved to fix the fundamental/structural flaws in the GST.

GST Council slashes tax rates on 177 items from 26% to 18%, leaving only 50 items in the highest tax slab.

It is one of the biggest packages concessions announced after the new indirect tax system took effect on 1 July.

In the 28% slab, there are sin and demerit goods.

This offers major relief to consumers and small businesses.

These revisions are expected to reduce prices and increase consumption and thereby bring growth.

‘People-friendly’ changes will also boost compliance.

It also lend fresh momentum to the tax reform initiative.

This would have a positive impact on the monthly household budget and also reduce the debate on classification issues.

If industry passes the benefit of tax rate cuts to consumers, it will help bring down inflation.

The eligibility ceiling for the composition scheme has been raised to Rs 1.5 crore from Rs 1 crore.

In case of North-Eastern states and Himachal Pradesh, the limit is Rs 75 lakh.

Composition scheme tax rate for SMEs halved to 1%.

Allows for quarterly filing of returns and payment of taxes.

There will be no inter-state taxes and input tax credit for composition dealers.

Government to deploy skill trainers to help traders file returns.

The Central Board of Excise and Custom’s (CBEC) over 4,500 GST seva kendras will also help these people.
In 2013, the court removed the statutory protection for convicted legislators from immediate disqualification.

The latest order marks another milestone in the higher judiciary’s continuing campaign to cleanse politics of the stain of crime.

Creating a court for a class of people such as politicians is discriminatory as it violates Right to Equality.

Earlier order for completion of trial within one year appears to have had no significant impact.

The ideal remedy will always be a speedy trial in regular courts.

If enough courts, judges, prosecutors and investigators are available, the special courts may not be needed at all.

Centre should fund the setting up of the special courts so that states are spared the burden of finding resources.

There are large pool of retired judges of experience and integrity and the government can choose from them.

The prosecutors who are not attached to any political party is the need of the hour.

A directorate of prosecution headed by a retired senior judge who chooses prosecutors must address this aspect.

Filing of multifarious interim applications by the political leaders which hinder the progress of trial needs to be avoided.

The Finance Minister can devise a ‘Swachh Politics Bharat Bond’ to create the infrastructure and staffing for the special courts.

Political parties must discourage fielding candidates with criminal and corruption charges pending against them.

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to frame a scheme to set up ‘special courts’ for the speedy trial of cases against MPs and MLAs.

The cases must be decided within a year, to put an end to the inordinate delay in the prosecution of politicians.

The Election Commission had told the SC that MPs and MLAs convicted in criminal cases must be banned from contesting elections for life.

Compliance within one-year had not been possible because regular courts were overburdened and it was not possible for them to fast-track cases against politicians.

In the present criminal justice system it takes years, probably decades, to complete the trial against a politician.

By this time, he or she would have served as a minister or legislator several times over.

To curb the growing menace of criminalisation of politics and corruption.

For speedy disposal of cases against lawmakers “in the country’s interest”.

Those with political influence have taken full advantage by delaying hearings, obtaining repeated adjournments and filing innumerable interlocutory petitions to stall any progress.

Special courts exist at present to try various offences including corruption, terrorism, sexual offences against children and drug trafficking.

MPs and MLAs form a distinct class and their early trial is a democratic need.

A disturbing 33 per cent of our nearly 4,860 MPs and MLAs have declared criminal cases against them.

Twenty per cent of them, an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms shows, are serious criminal cases.

They also engage in corruption and infect the bureaucracy and the police.
Japanese foreign minister had suggested that Britain and France too could be involved in this grouping.

The unreliability of the US is one of the reasons being given for their inclusion.

Security collaboration among a larger group is a challenging task as success depends on the credibility and commitment of each participant.

Greater the number of people at the table, narrower the agenda on which a consensus can be achieved.

Therefore, there isn’t much rationale for involving Britain and France at this stage.

Emergence of new players like the U.S. and Japan has only increased multiple regional rivalries in the region.

While the quadrilateral grouping will bring developmental projects, it will considerably erode India’s primacy in the neighbourhood.

India had impeded Chinese demand for a diplomatic mission in Bhutan, now it would be a challenge if US pursues the same.

India objected to Chinese naval presence in Sri Lanka. Now India will not be able to object to U.S. naval warships and Japanese presence there.

India while pursuing aspirations in global alliances falls short of its regional commitments. New Delhi has changed its position on Hambantota several times, ambivalent on tackling political issues in Nepal, Maldives crisis, Myanmar Rohingya issue etc.

Strategic analysts argue that India is dragging itself into the US-China rivalry.

World Bank and Asian Development Bank must focus on infrastructure funding in the region that would promote economic growth.

This can counter China’s large scale infrastructure building in countries of Southeast Asia to Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative.

India and Japan are already in discussions for the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor which is the step in right direction.

Owing to India’s presence and impact in South Asia the neighbourhood first policy should not take backseat.

"In a significant geostrategic move India, the US, Japan and Australia revitalized their quadrilateral grouping on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila."

The ‘quad’ has endorsed a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that isn’t monopolised by a single country.

The cooperation rests on a foundation of shared democratic values and principles.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.

The dialogue was initiated in 2007 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan.

Securing a rules-based global order, liberal trading system and freedom of navigation are believed to be the guiding principles.

The move to set up the quadrilateral comes in the backdrop of growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

It has also raised concerns regarding freedom of trade and navigation through the waters of the South and East China seas.

China’s aggressive posturing along land borders with countries like India and Bhutan.

Free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.

Tackle common challenges of terrorism and proliferation.

Upholding the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight.

Cooperation “to curtail DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea)’s nuclear and missile programmes and unlawful acts.

Involving the U.S. and Japan in development projects in South Asia will yield the necessary finances.

By joining the quad India has taken a significant turn in its policy for the subcontinent.

It gives New Delhi a powerful platform to advance its interests in East Asia, coordinate strategies with powerful friends and add more strength to its Act East initiative.

The geostrategic term “Indo-Pacific” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific” has been gaining currency.

It will deepen India’s ties with US, Australia and Japan with benefits in diplomatic leverage and sharing of burden in defence.

Working with US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific will provide New Delhi significant leverage in shaping US policies in Afghanistan-Pakistan to the benefit of India.
A model of human development based on economic progress alone is incomplete.

A society which fails to address basic human needs, improve their quality of life and protect the environment is not succeeding.

Inclusive growth requires both economic and social progress.

Measuring social progress offers citizens and leaders a more complete picture of how their country is developing.

That will help societies make better choices, create stronger communities, and enable people to lead more fulfilling lives.

The study (2005-2016) helps analyse whether State are heading in the right direction.

SPI ranks states using social and environmental indicators on the basis of their capability to provide for basic needs such as shelter, water, and sanitation.

All the States have climbed the social progress ladder.

It reveals that there are multiple paths to achieve social progress and economic growth is neither necessary nor sufficient to advance social outcomes.

Appropriate policies focusing with expenditure in priority areas along with strong implementation of the schemes has led Tamil Nadu on this path of inclusive development.

Mizoram, amidst all the security issues, has managed to provide its citizens with living standards comparable to those of high-income states.

SPI for India can be a powerful tool for state governments, working with business and civil society to manage progress towards achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

We need a cohesive measure of social progress in individual States.

Social progress needs to be stimulated by focussing on policies directly targeting social issues.

Need for creation of a society with equal opportunities for all.

Social progress not only depends on the economic development but also on the use of revenues generated by economic expansion.

Investments in innovative mechanisms.

Private businesses must complement government sector.

Accountable institutions are critical for improving the quality of life.

Regions must prioritize social issues such as education, health, safety etc. as the failure of regions to enhance social progress will drive down their future economic performance.

India was a symbol of hunger and poverty at the time of Independence and has now transformed into one of the fastest growing major economies.

These economic achievements are extensive, when considering the challenges that arose after decades of oppressive colonial rule and being a multi-religious secular entity.

The societal reach of this economic growth still remains unquantified.

The idea that economic development will automatically transform social conditions will hamper further improvements in social progress.

Delhi, one of the richest areas in India, fails to provide the best quality of life to its citizens.

It lags behind in areas of nutrition, environmental quality and personal safety.

Many states have better social outcomes than their high income counterparts.

Manipur and Mizoram are providing their citizens with standards of living that are comparable with many high-income states.

There have been efforts to track individual social outcomes such as health, education and safety.

National University of Educational Planning and Administration compute an Educational Development Index for primary and upper primary levels of education that compare States on aspects of education universalisation.

NITI Aayog has rolled out the health, education and water index.

There have also been efforts to look at progress through the lens of a human development index.

A common measure to quantify the social progress of Indian States that can pinpoint the achievements and the challenges is still missing.
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The cooperation rests on a foundation of shared democratic values and principles.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia and India. The dialogue was initiated in 2007 by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan.

Securing a rules-based global order, liberal trading system and freedom of navigation are believed to be the guiding principles.

The move to set up the quadrilateral comes in the backdrop of growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

It has also raised concerns regarding freedom of trade and navigation through the waters of the South and East China seas.

China’s aggressive posturing along land borders with countries like India and Bhutan.

Free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.

Tackle common challenges of terrorism and proliferation.

Upholding the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight.

Cooperation to curtail DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s) nuclear and missile programmes and unlawful acts.

Involving the U.S. and Japan in development projects in South Asia will yield the necessary finances.

By joining the quad India has taken a significant turn in its policy for the subcontinent.

It gives New Delhi a powerful platform to advance its interests in East Asia, coordinate strategies with powerful friends and add more strength to its Act East initiative.

The geostrategic term “Indo-Pacific” as opposed to “Asia-Pacific” has been gaining currency.

It will deepen India’s ties with US, Australia and Japan with benefits in diplomatic leverage and sharing of burden in defence.

Working with the US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific will provide New Delhi significant leverage in shaping US policies in Afghanistan-Pakistan to the benefit of India.

Emergence of new players like the U.S. and Japan has only increased multiple regional rivalries in the region.

While the quadrilateral grouping will bring developmental projects, it will considerably erode India’s primacy in the neighbourhood.

India had impeded Chinese demand for a diplomatic mission in Bhutan, now it would be a challenge if US pursues the same.

India objected to Chinese naval presence in Sri Lanka. Now India will not be able to object to U.S. naval warships and Japanese presence there.

India’s while pursuing aspirations in global alliances falls short of its regional commitments. New Delhi has changed its position on Hamantoba several times, ambivalent on tackling political issues in Nepal, Maldives crisis, Myanmar Rohingya issue etc.

Strategic analysts argue that India is dragging itself into the US-China rivalry.

World Bank and Asian Development Bank must focus on infrastructure funding in the region that would promote economic growth.

This can counter China’s large scale infrastructure building in countries of Southeast Asia to Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative.

India and Japan are already in discussions for the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor which is the step in right direction.

Owing to India’s presence and impact in South Asia the neighbourhood first policy should not take backseat.
Delhi has registered its worst air quality in recent times.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted that the city has become a gas chamber.

If serious steps are not taken, Delhi may soon face an "air pollution disaster" which London saw 65 years ago.

With the onset of winter season, meteorological conditions like wind pattern and low temperature aggravates pollution levels.

Combination of smoke from stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana and moisture turned Delhi into a "gas chamber".

Particulate matter air pollution is worse in winter due to "inversion" where warm air rests above and cooler air temperatures trap smog closer to ground.

Exhausts from automobiles, industry and thermal power plants.

High level of high-emission vehicles and Delhi has more cars than it can handle.

Among megacities Delhi has the worst air quality, according to the WHO report.

The air quality index (AQI) is in the severe category with the warning that healthy people are also affected.

The level of the harmful PM2.5 was several times over the standard of 60 micrograms per cubic metre.

Doctors have termed the situation a "public health emergency".

Lungs of the elderly and children are less capable of handling such levels of pollutants and thus they develop breathing difficulty.

It can also affect the cardio-vascular system and the brain.

When pollution levels rise, the condition of those suffering from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or asthma worsens.

Despite the ban on crackers this Diwali, the air quality index has deteriorated.

Indoor and outdoor air pollution made up more than 10% of the total burden of disease in 2016.

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Concerns / Challenges

Delhi has 15 air pollution monitoring stations manned by the CPCB, of which only 10 are functional. In comparison, Beijing has 35 and London 100.

The value of work time lost due to illness by the patient or the caregiver.

Even though farmers are aware that the burning of straw is harmful to health, they do not have alternatives for utilising them effectively.

The WHO says that breathing Delhi air for a day is equal to smoking 20 cigarettes.

As per estimates, air pollution is costing India around three per cent of the GDP in terms of health costs.

Create awareness among the masses by installing LED panels displaying pollution levels.

Preventive measures like hike in parking fees and slashing of metro fares.

Need for implementing long-term measures as the use of nasal filters or air purifiers can provide short-term relief only.

Residents must avoid stepping out or doing outdoor activities during the early morning and evening hours.

Doctors must address school children about air pollution and its hazards.

CPCB should direct local bodies to check open burning of solid waste and strictly enforce rules related to prevention of emission from construction activities.

Mechanical sweeping with water wash and vacuum-assisted sweeping of roads to reduce road dust emission.

There is great potential for making investments in paddy straw-based power plants which can help avoid stubble burning and create employment opportunities.

The efforts of the MoEFCC, ministry of power, MNRE, MoRTH, MoHUA, MOHFW and a variety of non-governmental partners must come together for dealing with air pollution.

There must be political will for political parties and governments to firstly acknowledge the scale of this health emergency and then work together.

To regulate automobiles -- stringent measures are needed. For example, Singapore has decided to stop registration of all new vehicles.
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**Delhi Air Pollution**

**Introduction**

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**Concerns / Challenges**

Masks available in the market may not be enough to keep pollutants from getting into lungs.

The state pollution control board faces institutional, technical, and manpower constraints.

Even those with strong immunity will get affected if the intake of this air is for a prolonged period.

**Reason for Delhi Air pollution**

Create awareness among the masses by installing LED panels displaying pollution levels

Preventive measures like hike in parking fees and slashing of metro fares.

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**Way Forward**

**Severity of the problem**

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Moody's Investors Service upgraded India's sovereign credit rating to Baa2 from Baa3, changing outlook to 'stable' from 'positive'. This is higher than Brazil, Russia and South Africa but lower than China. Moody's has upgraded India's ranking for the first time in 14 years. This has happened at a time when India's ranking in the ease of doing business index moved up 30 places. Moody's believes that various reforms undertaken will, over time, change India in a fundamental manner.

**Introduction**
It would bring down the costs of overseas borrowing for India. It will have a positive impact on corporate borrowing. It will also bring down the cost of capital and lower credit costs. It shows the faith an international credit rating agency has on the country's economic policies. India has an opportunity to stand out among a group of emerging market countries. It will improve sentiments around ease of doing business within local and global investors. This would enable NBFCs to borrow at cheaper rates. Improve the business climate, enhancing productivity, stimulating foreign and domestic investment, and ultimately fostering strong and sustainable growth. A strengthening economy could prompt companies to accelerate capacity expansion plans, increase hiring and raising job prospects. Larger corporates will benefit, but not the smaller and mid-sized ones immediately. The government's debt is a cause for concern, with the debt to GDP ratio at 66% in 2016 against a comfort level of 44% in this particular rating category. This could severely hamper the government's ability to take any more debt for infrastructure projects. Uncertainty in the private investments. More of government spending will impact the fiscal deficit of the country. Farm loan waivers by States, implementation of 7th pay commission’s award and teething issues with GST will create more fiscal burden.

**Implications**
Wide ranging reforms
- Government efforts to reduce corruption, formalize economic activity and improve tax collection and administration through demonetization and GST
- The Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfers will remove 40-50% leakages associated with India's subsidy programme.
- Government addressing twin balance-sheet problem through the insolvency code and bank recapitalisation.
- Adoption of new FRBM Act, is expected to enhance India's fiscal policy framework.
- Adoption of a flexible inflation targeting regime and the formation of a Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)
- Moody's expects GDP growth to moderate to 6.7 per cent in the fiscal year ending in March 2018.
- Longer term, India's growth potential is significantly higher than most other Baa-rated sovereigns
- India's forex reserves have shot up impressively as it currently hovers around $400 billion
- Driven by both FPIs in equity and bond markets and FDIs, the rupee has strengthened.
- Although not directly linked to Rating upgrade, it would be important to note that India is at the 100th slot in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business.

**Moody's Upgrades India's Rating**

**What led to Moody's upgrading India's ratings**
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**Steps taken to strengthen banks**
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Introduction

It is responsible for the protection and promotion of “rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants”.

Concerns / Challenges

The first case in the Supreme Court, the NHRC referred to itself as “a toothless tiger”.

NHRC as a toothless tiger

The NHRC’s feeling of helplessness is a matter of grave concern.

The public perception about it has deteriorated.

In most cases, it issues notices to the authorities and there is no record of follow-up.

Working of NHRC

The present discussion is to examine the functioning and effectiveness of the NHRC and identify the challenges relating to human rights and work towards tackling them.

Way Forward

It is a good time to examine the functioning and effectiveness of the NHRC and identify the challenges relating to human rights and work towards tackling them.

It is important that NHRC succeed in their efforts to promote and protect human rights.

Problems with the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993

NHRC cannot penalise authorities which do not implement its orders.


NHRC cannot investigate an event if the complaint was made more than one year after the incident.

Does not empower the NHRC to act when human rights violations through private parties take place.

Does not specify whether judges (members for the NHRC) should have a proven record of human rights activism or expertise or qualifications in the area.

Relating to violations of human rights by the armed forces, the commission must simply seek a report from the Government, and then issue recommendations.

Conclusion

There is no statutory requirement to include academics, representatives of NGOs or members of civil society that have contributed towards enhancement of human rights.

Non-compliance by the states with the directions for compensation issued by the commission.

The few compliance reports it receives from state governments are of poor quality, often illegible and incomplete.

Shortage of adequate number of trained staff to handle the growing number of complaints.

Large expenditure on office expenses, leaving small amounts for research and rights awareness programmes.

It is finding it difficult to address the increasing number of complaints.

As non-judicial member positions are being filled by ex-bureaucrats, it is said that NHRC is more an extension of the government.

All this hampers its efficient functioning, and causes delays in redressal of grievances.

In the past five years, NHRC has not conducted studies or published reports on well known cases of human rights violations.

The NHRC does not have fair and equal means of representation in terms of gender, religious minority groups and disabled populations.

Maximise the number of potential candidates from a wide range of societal groups and educational qualifications.

The effectiveness of commissions will be greatly enhanced if their decisions are immediately made enforceable by the government.

All State Governments must abide by the directions issued by the NHRC in regard to compensation and other issues.

If the people of our country are deprived of human rights or cannot have them enforced, democracy itself would be in peril.

Many social and human rights activists have the practical experience in human rights movement and can greatly contribute towards the working of the Commission.

It is a good time to examine the functioning and effectiveness of the NHRC and identify the challenges relating to human rights and work towards tackling them.

It is important that NHRC succeed in their efforts to promote and protect human rights.

National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC), is a statutory body established in 1993, under the provisions of The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
The 2017 National Press Day was observed with the theme as "challenges before the media".

Paid news and making "credibility" a casualty in the pursuit to sensationalise news.

Corporate and political power has overwhelmed large sections of the media and distorting facts to further their interest.

Experts say there are threats of violence from vested interests and pressure from political parties.

Defamation cases against journalists.

Excessive coverage or hype of sensitive news has led to communal riots at times.

Commercialization has created a stiff competition in media.

Attacks on journalists. Recent murder of Kannada journalist Gauri Lankesh.

Investigative reporting is increasingly becoming a dangerous occupation.

News censorship. NDTV – which came under fire for its coverage of the Pathankot operation.

Vulnerability of RTI activists has increased.

The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, puts restrictions on the media. To register its strong opposition 'Rajasthan Patrika' leaves its editorial blank.

Setting up a media body to look into guidelines and regulations on its working.

Media houses must take extra effort to maintain credibility and use the editorial freedom wisely for public interest.

Media should take utmost care in airing or publishing sensational news.

Implementing the recommendations of TRAI with regard to media ownership and investment disclosure norms would help in maintaining transparency.

Disclosure, in bold letters, of paid-for news or any reporting at the end of each print article or visual programme.

Need for political will in improving India's ranking on the Press Freedom Index as they do towards the World Bank's Doing Business Rankings.

Mahatma Gandhi said that "The press is called the Fourth Estate. It is definitely a power but a misuse of power is criminal."

A free press is the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy.

Freedom of the press and journalistic ethics is an important topic today.

Freedom of the press has been treated as part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

For a proper functioning of democracy it is essential that citizens are kept informed about news so that they form rational opinions.

The media have played a historical role in providing information to the people about social and economic evils.

Media makes us aware of various social, political and economical activities happening around the world.

Educating rural illiterate masses in making them aware of all the events in their local language.

Exposes loopholes in the democratic system. A democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels.

Responsibility to fight against casteism, and help the people in their struggle against poverty and other social evils.

The role of the media in giving voice to the voiceless.

The media has added great strength to 'Swachh Bharat Mission' and effectively furthered the message of cleanliness.

The rise of social media and news being consumed through mobile phones make the media space even more democratic and participative.

Freedom of the press was of utmost importance as it was a powerful tool to propagate political ideas.

Many newspapers emerged under distinguished and fearless journalists.

These included The Hindu under G. SubramaniyaAiyar, Amrita Bazar Patrika under Sir Srinivasan, Kesari and Maharashtra under Bal Gangadhar Tilak etc.

The main aim of these newspapers was not to make profit but to serve the public.

Chief instrument for carrying out the main political tasks.

Political propaganda, education, and formation of nationalist ideology to awake, train, mobilize and consolidate nationalist public opinion.

The Government had enacted many stringent laws to curb the newspapers, such as Vernacular Press Act and Section 124 A of the IPC.
Coal and Power Shortage in India

Consequences:
- Coal stocks at power plants across the country have declined.
- According to reports, 625 MW in coal-fired plants across the country were completely offline and 30 GW of capacity is threatened due to coal shortages.
- Global prices have shot to above $90 per tonne, a rise of 40% in seven months.

Introduction:
- Non-evacuation of coal from their mines.
- Heavy monsoon rains affected Coal India Limited (CIL) production badly.
- Railways' failure to transport adequate amounts of coal from mines to power plants due to series of railway accidents took train tracks offline for maintenance.

Reasons:
- Factors such as reduction in hydel generation and increased power consumption have led to a rise in demand for thermal coal.
- The power ministry asked utility companies and non-power sector players, to stock adequate coal in their premises, which they did not do.
- India imported 215 million tonnes of coal in the fiscal year 2015, possibly the highest in history.

Way Forward:
- This was partly a consequence of the Supreme Court's 2014 decision to cancel all coal block allocations to private coal miners.
- Coal is an integral and large part of our energy for the foreseeable future.

- Allow more private players in coal mining or as mining operators.
- Allow private coal users to own or lease and run their own private rakes.
- Allow road movement of coal in addition to rail, at least in the monsoon months.
- Increase the penalty for fuel-supply agreements (FSAs) non-compliance.
- Make it mandatory for power companies to have a minimum inventory of, say, two weeks of coal at all times.
- Speed up completion of rail links from pitheads to nearby power users on high priority.
- Increase the amount of coal to be transported by road and use all means to increase the supply.
- Improve the national grid for electricity so that surplus power is never stranded, unlike surplus coal at pitheads.
- Improve the health of discoms.

It is private sector plants which are worst affected
- Due to shortage of coal at generation companies, there was load shedding in Maharashtra and other states.
- The promised coal to non-power users like metal producers through fuel-supply agreements (FSAs) has not been delivered.
- With high electricity demand and coal-fired plants constrained by fuel shortage, price in the open power market has spiked.
- Low hydro and wind power generation this season, has also pushed up power prices
- Buying costly electricity from the free market could further aggravate discoms financial problems.
Online apps and games, which are created to attract their users, are particularly addictive for kids. Limiting their creativity and imaginations. Challenges to their bodies to achieve optimal sensory and motor development. Use of ready made calculating device often stops children from exercising their brain. With typing/voice recognition, children are seen to avoid writing. Also auto-correct and suggestion hurts their grammar and spelling abilities. More time spent on gadgets and digital tools could lower Emotional Intelligence (EI) due to shrinkages in the time children spend in face-to-face interactions.

Cyberbullying has become increasingly common among children and teenagers.

Technology provides tons of positive opportunities for learning, entertaining, and socializing, but it should be monitored and used appropriately. Setting daily limits for how long children can use technology each day. Parents must explain children the negative effects that technology can have. Encouraging kids who are eager to participate in exercise, spend time outdoors, or socialize with friends in ‘real life’ instead of online. Parents must set a good example by not using phone or computer constantly in front of their children. Communication between kids and their parents as well as parents and the school is crucial in dealing with addiction to electronic devices.

Parents, teachers and health professionals must understand the complexities of this issue, and help create effective strategies to reduce technology over-use.

A mere 20 years ago, children used to play outside all day, riding bikes, playing sports and building forts which didn’t require costly equipment or parental supervision. Today technology has completely changed virtually every aspect of our society. The smartest users of technology are children. Technology can be a great learning tool for kids, but only if parents use it right.

Technology has become vital to kids’ future achievement and a necessary part of their education. Digital evolution and the boom in smartphone adoption are fast changing the way students learn. Videos and interactive features on smart devices have become a popular mode of learning. Technology is shaping the teacher-student relationship by offering better accessibility, distribution and formats of delivery. It offers instant interactivity irrespective of their geographical location. Explaining concepts with visual representations makes learning both exciting and easier.

Unchecked and unfiltered usage can be dangerous for kids. It has clear health implications and can affect sleep. Prevent kids from engaging in physical activity, thereby contributing to India’s rising childhood obesity rates. It can exacerbate mental health issues, and perpetuate social isolation. Studies have shown that young children who are screen users exhibit higher rates of aggression. Technology also has profound impacts on the way children think and feel. Technology changes the way kids socialize and interact with others, which can have huge impacts on their mental and emotional well-being. Kids don’t develop a bond with friends. Friendship has become more of digital bonding than emotional bonding. Parents and children are not spending enough time with each other affecting their relationship.
Introduction

A bot is a software application that runs automated tasks over the Internet.

Mainly used to gather information on the Internet or perform repetitive jobs at a much higher rate than would be possible for a human alone.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella has said, “Bots are the new apps.”

Some popular examples of bots are Apple’s Siri, the Google Assistant, Amazon’s Alexa and Microsoft’s Cortana.

One of the typical beneficial uses of a bot is to gather information.

Benefits

Automatic interaction using instant messaging and instant relay chat can handle customer queries and guide customers.

Dynamic interaction with websites

Artificial intelligence-based bots are used by organisations to provide customer care, and sales and marketing services.

Bots in Today’s World

Banks have also introduced AI-based chatbots that are capable of interacting with users and answering information-related queries.

Improve workplace efficiency

Many bots are programmed to act like humans which provide highly personalized and emotionally-aware interactions.

Way Forward

Weather bots which inform about the weather conditions in the locality

Track personal finances and provide personal finance assistance

Concerns / Challenges

Growing usage of Bots

According to research, by 2021 more than 50% of enterprises will be spending more per annum on bots

The bots are carrying out the first-level of hiring, looking through resumes, and also conducting the first-level of interviews

The ‘Made-in-India’ robo-healer Wyasa has got 1.25 lakh virtual ‘patients’ in 30 countries

Therapy bots are important in countries like India as there is an acute shortage of psychologists

Malicious bot acts as self-propagating malware that infects its host

Malicious bots can gather passwords, obtain financial information, relay spam, and exploit by viruses.

Automated accounts on Twitter and Facebook is spreading misinformation

Bots can’t replace the power of intuition

Fear of data privacy and security concerns.

Robodocs can’t deal with crisis situations.

Ninety percent of the new internet users are expected to be non-English speakers in the next few years. Addressing this is a challenge.

Fears that humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, could be superseded by AI.

Bots have the ability to create huge problems for website owners, from stealing content to taking a website offline.

Bots must be conditioned to respond to each customer in a way that is personalized and feels natural.

Bots need to be designed to be faster and easier to use.

They need to be more intuitive and respond to fewer clicks, touches, and typing.

To act against malicious bot it is important to have good anti-malware software. All software should be updated and system updates should not be ignored.
India remains vulnerable to cyber-espionage and cybercrime. With the growing adoption of the Internet and smart-phones, India has emerged "as one of the favourite countries among cyber criminals."

There is growing threat from online radicalization.

Lack of coordination among different government agencies.

Attackers can gain control of vital systems such as nuclear plants, railways, transportation or hospitals that can subsequently lead to dire consequences.

New technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning also face new challenges for cyber security.

Internet of things are often not built with security.

New technologies aid hackers too.

We don't have a cyber security mindset. People still don't understand cyber risks to an organisation.

Most of the cyber attacks are not reported.

Scarcity of cybersecurity professionals, especially at the leadership level.

Cyber bullies, extremists and terrorists are creating havoc within the system.

India is not a signatory to the Budapest convention which is the only multilateral convention on cyber security.

No full time cyber security experts.

Coordination among CERTs of different countries.

Nations must take responsibility to ensure that the digital space does not become a playground for the dark forces of terrorism and radicalization.

Alertness towards cyber-security concerns should become a way of life.

Ensure that vulnerable sections of our society do not fall prey to the evil designs of cyber criminals.

Understanding and implementing the global best practices of the cyber space.

Need for India to move on from IT security to cyber security.

Law enforcement authorities and businesses must punish individuals using technology to cause damage.

A person won't stop causing damage unless there is deterrence.

Organisations that are hit by cyber attacks must inform law enforcement immediately instead of worrying about their reputations.

Important to have crisis management plans so that it helps to react in a given situation.

India's Vulnerability on cyber space

Introduction

Concerns / Challenges

Growing Importance

Way Forward

Cyber Security In India

Need For Cyber security

Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (APCERT)

Government announced that:

- It will fund and encourage research and Ph.Ds students in the area of cyber security
- Preference to cyber security products in government procurement which have been manufactured in India as part of the preferential market access policy
- Grant Rs. 5 crore to start-ups doing innovation in the field of cyber security
- Engage in "cyber diplomacy" as there is a need to strengthen the online security apparatus with a global perspective.

Cyber security is concerned with making cyberspace safe from threats.

Cyber is no more limited to security only, it is now linked with socio economics as well, which includes politics, industry, health, education and critical infrastructure.

This is why cyber security and safety has become an imperative issue.

Cyber security spends in India are rising rapidly because of the massive digitisation movement.

The ransomware attacks in the past have added to the urgency of these spends.

Cyber-space remains a key area for innovation.

Demonetisation and the government's push for Digital India have pushed demand for cybersecurity talent.

To ensure critical infrastructure system do not collapse under any situation.

To ensure Business continuity.

For the success of government initiatives like Digital India, Make in India and Smart Cities.

To balance Individual's rights, liberty and privacy.

India hosted the 15th Conference of the APCERT.
Concerns about Chinese expansionism have not prevented several Asian nations from endorsing and backing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Most Asian nations also show no inclination or desire to blame China for siding with Pakistan.

China wins the support of Asian nations through lavish aid offers and other financial inducements.

Even Mr. Trump, during his recent visit to China, seemed to have softened his criticism of China, after China produced some attractive mega deals.

The Indo-Pacific region is now central to global politics and economics.

China is the most important player in the region.

Beijing is now more confident than ever of projecting regional and global power.

China has good fortune because U.S. lacks clear purpose and is unable to communicate effectively its priorities for the region.

This makes this period of transition very significant for India that has a stake in the long-term stability of the region.

A free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the longterm interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is being revived without the U.S.

The idea of an Indo-Pacific quadrilateral involving Japan, Australia, India and the U.S. is back.

Now India engages with other regional players if it helps to further Indian interests in maintaining a stable balance of power.

India has taken up issues beyond South Asia, such as North Korea and China’s actions in the South China Sea.

India is firmly committed to freedom of navigation and over-flight, unimpeded commerce based on the principles of UNCLOS, opposing China’s ambitions in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the ASEAN asked for upholding of the “rules based regional security architecture”, an expression often described to refer to China’s opposition to adhere to the UN laws of the seas (UNCLOS).

He pitched for rules-based regional security architecture, to deal with China’s intent to dominate the region.

Upholding the rules based order and cooperation based on converging vision and values promote peace and security.

India’s relationship with ASEAN is a key pillar of its foreign policy.

U.S. continues to be unsure of its security commitments, and therefore there is a new opportunity for India in the region.

ASEAN is currently India’s fourth largest trading partner, accounting for 10.2% of India’s total trade.

India’s service-oriented economy complements the manufacturing-based economies of ASEAN countries.

The two sides must think strategically to increase cooperation for a favourable balance of power that would ensure regional stability.

India must boost its domestic economic reforms agenda, enhance connectivity within the region, and increase its presence in regional institutions.

Terrorism and extremism is the major challenges facing the region and it is time to deal with it collectively.

Maritime links have enabled our trade relations in the past and we have to work closely to strengthen them.

All the 10 ASEAN leaders will be chief guests at the 2018 Republic Day celebrations.

Achieving a rules-based regional security architecture is needed for the regions peaceful development.

The ASEAN nations should be clearer in their expectations from New Delhi and nudge India for a deeper, more broad-based engagement.
Concerns about Chinese expansionism have not prevented several Asian nations from endorsing and backing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Most Asian nations also show no inclination or desire to blame China for siding with Pakistan.

China wins the support of Asian nations through lavish aid offers and other financial inducements.

Even Mr. Trump, during his recent visit to China, seemed to have softened his criticism of China, after China produced some attractive mega deals.

The Indo-Pacific region is now central to global politics and economics.

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We are still far from keeping the world safe from its harmful consequences.

The second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, has not been ratified by a sufficient number of countries to enter into force.

The anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions would severely affect the poorest countries that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The promise of $100 billion each year by 2020 into the Green Climate Fund, has not seen much inflow.

Expecting that all countries keep up their Nationally Determined Contributions promises is far from reality.

Worsening the matters is US’s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement despite being the world’s biggest greenhouse gas emitter.

China the second biggest emitter is shutting down coal plants on its soil, but building more elsewhere in the world.

The recent Emissions Gap Report underscores the mismatch between the voluntary pledges made by countries for the Paris Agreement and what is necessary to keep a rise in global temperature below 2°C.

India’s progress in reducing the intensity of its greenhouse gas emissions has been positive.

It is on track to achieve the national pledge under the 2015 Paris Agreement

40% of India’s power needs will be met by renewable energy by 2030

India is progressing towards generating 175 gigawatts of renewable power by 2022

India could further raise its ambition in the use of green technologies, which would mark it as a global climate leader.

Much more needs to be done by the international community to truly grapple with climate change

Greater ambition on bringing down the fossil fuels is needed for the Paris Agreement to be successful.

The developed countries which are responsible for the climate mess must commit to funding and technology.

India, being a developing country and vulnerable to climate change must lead the fight against climate change.

The negotiators still have to do lot more on finalising the rules which would be adopted during the next COP24 in Poland in 2018.

The 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-23) of the UNFCCC concluded in Bonn, Germany.

The conference is held to further the provisions of the Paris Agreement

The key topics were related to financial support, mitigation action, differentiation, and loss and damage.

The Conference made progress on framing rules for implementing the Paris Agreement

Developing countries negotiated hard to get the rich countries report, by May 2018, their progress under the Doha Amendment

Regarding agriculture, a work plan was proposed by Parties on items related to climate change and agriculture. For India, these developments could be an opportunity for learning

A few project-specific funding announcements were made, such as for green buildings, ‘power past coal’ and eco-mobility.

The key question of when coal will be phased out globally was not addressed.

However, 15 countries led by Canada and the UK formed an alliance to cut down their use of coal by 2030.

‘Gender action plan’ to include women in climate activities

A plan to have “indigenous people” (adivasis) to have a say in climate talks

Little progress on the key issue of finance

An important outcome is the ‘Talanoa Dialogue’.

‘Talanoa Dialogue’ is a year-long process to assess countries’ progress on climate actions.

Under this, it was agreed that the next two climate conferences, in 2018 and 2019, will have special ‘stock-taking’ sessions.
Income inequality can erode the consensus in favour of pro-growth economic policies, and spur political instability. Progressive redistribution policies could end up hurting the economy, by reducing business investment.

There is a growing temptation to reject globalization and embrace populist redistribution policies that could end up doing far more harm than good.

Income inequality in India has negatively impacted poor citizens' access to education and healthcare. It violates a basic democratic norm: the equal standing of citizens.

People working in unorganized sectors are the worst sufferers of economic inequality. They are characterized by low wages, long working hours and lack of basic services.

Providing opportunities for youth, whatever their background, to ascend the income ladder.

Governments must complement their pro-growth policies with policies ensuring that the gains are shared more equally and sustainably.

Effective development of human capital, which not only supports higher incomes today, but also ensures intergenerational mobility tomorrow.

Raise the minimum wages and tax rates for the highest income earners & corporate entities. Investing more in public education, in order to expand opportunities for all population groups.

Reforming curricula to ensure that young people are getting the knowledge and skills they need to prepare them for the labour market.

Labour market should be made more efficient and flexible, so that it can match people with the right jobs and reward them adequately.

As technology continues to transform the economy, life-long education and training is needed to enable workers to keep up.

Government should sustain pro-growth policies that boost overall job creation and reduce unemployment. There is need to tackle bias against caste and gender by recognising the value and dignity of all work (including unpaid work) and all workers.

Growing Income Inequality

Income inequality refers to income distributed in an uneven manner among a population.

Asian countries' rapid economic expansion has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in recent decades.

Yet the income distribution has lately worsened, with inequality more severe in Asia than in the developed economies of the West.

New technologies raise demand for skilled workers that fuels the expansion of the wage gap between skilled and unskilled.

Nobel laureate Angus Deaton has acknowledged. Globalization and technological innovation have helped to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots.

Income inequality often goes hand in hand with inequality of opportunity like limited educational and economic prospects for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

India has a high number of multi-generational billionaires and many transfer wealth to their heirs.

Agriculture remains a key sector and land reform has been only very partial.

Income inequality is "likely to exacerbate" due to the "governments inability to create jobs".

Emphasis on reduction of the fiscal deficit leads to low spending on social welfare schemes.

In India not everyone has shared the rapid growth of wealth.

Disparity in ratios of per capita income of the top 1% and bottom 50%.

The share of national income accruing to the top 1% income earners is now at its highest level.

According to Global Wage Report 2016-17 of the International Labour Organisation, India has huge gender pay gap and gender wage disparity.

Even the "Asian Tigers"—Hong Kong, Singapore & Taiwan, which were previously known for equity, face rising inequality.

In advanced economies like USA and France, the gap between the rich and poor is at its highest level.
Election Commission said all political parties need to be brought on board before such an exercise is carried out.

It will allow an incumbent government to formulate policies for a longer period without interruptions due to model code of conduct.

Niti Aayog has also favoured conducting synchronised two-phase Lok Sabha and assembly elections from 2024 in “national interest”.

All elections in India should happen in a free, fair and synchronised manner to ensure minimum “campaign mode” disruption to governance.

Law Commission of India in its 170th report recommended simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative.

79th report of the parliamentary standing committee on Law and Justice recommended a two-phase election schedule – one concurrent with Lok Sabha elections, the second in the mid-term of the Lok Sabha.

The Election Commission has also extended its in-principle support for the simultaneous elections.

An analysis by IDFC institute shows that on average, there is a 77% chance that the Indian voter will vote for the same party for both the State and Centre when elections are held simultaneously.

In such cases, the national issues and national parties take precedence over issues of state importance and small regional parties.

Creating a political consensus for simultaneous elections

Centre will have to make some states agree to curtail the terms of their houses while others to extend theirs.

Several constitutional amendments are required to see the plan through.

To preserve simultaneity in the event of a vote of no confidence or President’s rule.

Any changes must require both a constitutional amendment and judicial approval that they do not violate the “basic structure” of the Constitution.

A focused group of constitutional experts, think tanks, government officials and representatives of political parties should be formed to work out appropriate implementation related details.

State funding of elections

Decriminalisation of politics

Bringing in transparency in political funding

Setting up National Electoral Fund to which all donors can contribute.

Simultaneous polls refer to holding elections to Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies simultaneously, once in a five year.

The idea of holding elections simultaneously is recently in the news after it got a push from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Elections are held all the time and continuous polls lead to a lot of expenditure.

Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is seen as an obstacle to the government service delivery mechanism. Simultaneous elections may reduce such disruption.

If elections are held at once, then expenses of political parties will also be under control.

Large number of teachers are involved in the electoral process which causes maximum harm to the education sector.

Security forces also have to be diverted for the electoral work.

The impact of black money on the voters will be reduced as all elections are held at a time.

Populist measures by governments will reduce.

There can be more synergy between MPs and MLAs as the tenure matches one another.

MPs and MLAs will have more time to devote to their official duties and constituencies.

British Parliament, which is regarded as the ‘mother of parliaments’, enacted ‘Fixed Term Parliaments Act, 2011’, by which elections have been fixed for every five years.

Simultaneous elections are not constitutionally mandated.

In the initial two decades after independence it was held because of historical coincidence and political stability.

If the government loses its majority because of no confidence motion, then elections become inevitable.

With no elections in the intervening period, some of the elected representatives may not show much interest in the initial years.

Frequent elections act as checks and balances on the functioning of elected representatives.

Simultaneous elections go against the federal principles whereby each state has devised its own format of political competition.

Simultaneous elections will relegate local issues or issues of state importance to the background. This completely ignores the diversity of the country.

Elections create a large number of work opportunities for the people.
Transparent method of funding political parties is vital to the system of free and fair elections.

The 255th Law Commission Report on Electoral Reforms observed that opacity in political funding results in "lobbying and capture" of the government by big donors.

According to Association of Democratic Reforms, 65% of the income of political parties is from unknown sources.

Transparency in political funding in India is abysmal.

Lower the transparency in political funding, the easier it is for the super-rich to influence the government and higher is the crony-capitalism.

The real incomes of political parties are much greater than their declared income.

This unaccounted income is not captured by EC or IT department.

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.

Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi has suggested a National Electoral Fund to which all donors can contribute.

The funds would be allocated to political parties in proportion to the votes they get.

This protects the identity of donors and also weeds out black money from political funding.

Since public funds will be involved, there must be an annual audit by the CAG or an auditor approved by it.

If all the transactions being done by political parties are regulated by a legislation, it might prove to be more effective and simple.

Excluding candidates against whom there are evidences of spending black money from future elections can act as a strong deterrent.

Voters have to be made aware through awareness campaigns about illeffects of money power during elections.

State funding of political parties as proposed by Indrajit Gupt Committee will ensure a level playing field for all the parties.

Bringing political parties under the preview of RTI act:

Electoral Bonds in India

Electoral bonds are essentially bearer bonds that ensure donor anonymity.

They are just like cash, but with an expiry date.

They will be issued by a notified bank for specified denominations. The party can convert these bonds back into money via their bank accounts.

Through the Finance Act, 2016, FCRA rules were amended to allow political parties to accept donations from foreign companies.

A foreign company can anonymously donate unlimited sums to an Indian political party without the EC or the IT department ever getting to know.

Through Finance Act, 2017 amendments were done to RPA, Companies Act and IT Act.

RBI Act was also amended for the issuance of Electoral Bonds.

The amendment in the Finance Act eliminates the 7.5% cap on company donations, which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations.

There is no requirement for a company to have been in existence for three years (paving the way for fly-by-night shell companies).

Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated (so shareholders won’t know where their money has gone).

The funding for opposition parties may be affected.

The annual contribution reports of political parties to be furnished to the EC need not mention names and addresses of those contributing by way of electoral bonds.

This will have a major implication on transparency in political funding.

Issues in Political Funding after changes made in 2016 and 2017

Way Forward
Neither seeding nor the ABBA can stop quantity fraud. PDS dealer gives people a little less than their due—say 23 kg of food grain per month instead of 25 kg.

If dealers give people less than their due, biometric authentication does not help. ABBA has minimum role in reducing corruption in the short time.

Many poor people do not know the rules of Aadhaar seeding and biometric authentication. Inclusion errors increase the financial burden of the state, exclusion errors can often leave poor families vulnerable to hunger.

Lack of an Aadhaar number automatically disqualifies eligible individuals. It raises Privacy issues.

It is flexibility (an elderly person asking a neighbour to fetch their grain) that is lost when the ABBA is made mandatory. Cases of deaths due to hunger as people could not collect rations because of a biometric mismatch at the PDS shop.

Disenfranchisement of the elderly and the disabled, as ABBA requires beneficiaries to visit the PDS outlet personally for fingerprint authentication.

Biometric systems around the world have largely failed to provide their intended benefits.

Inconsistencies need to be resolved for successful Aadhaar seeding.

The transitional phase should be flexible.

It is essential to deal with issues of duplication, use less disruptive methods than Aadhaar such as food coupons, smart cards, and last-mile tracking.

Using other technology to curb corruption like computerisation, SMS alerts, online availability of official records, toll-free helplines and so on.

Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) system uses an electronic point of sale (PoS) machine to authenticate each transaction.

The Central government has been insisting on 100% Aadhaar “seeding” for PDS, MGNREGA and pensions.

For successful ABBA transaction, Seeding of Aadhaar numbers, PoS machines, Internet connection, Remote Aadhaar servers and Fingerprint recognition must work simultaneously.

ABBA helps reduce corruption

Eliminate identity fraud (for example, duplicate or bogus beneficiaries)

Reduce siphoning of grains by the dealers, thereby improving the delivery of welfare schemes to the benefit of the poor.

Many are unaware of the seeding requirement.

In some cases, the middlemen had seeded it wrongly.

Seeding process is not as simple as it sounds.

ABBA requires power supply, a functional PoS machine, mobile and Internet connectivity and fingerprint authentication which may not work at times.

Study shows high biometric failure rates.

Recent events in Jharkhand shed some light on the damage done by compulsory biometric authentication in the Public Distribution System (PDS).

ABBA requires Aadhaar seeding. Seeding often creates inconsistencies between ration-cards database and the Aadhaar database.

For instance, names may be spelt differently in the two databases.

There was a similar hassle of Aadhaar seeding in the context of the PAN-Aadhaar linkage.

For underprivileged people, many of them depend heavily on middlemen, who extract a price at every step.

Biometric authentication at ration shop requires successful fingerprint recognition. There are elderly persons and manual labourers with rough fingerprints.

Even those for whom ABBA eventually works, face much inconvenience, anxiety and waste of time.
There is an increase in women business owners and operators over the past several years. But, various studies have shown that women entrepreneurs in the country are among the most disadvantaged in the world. A recent study by the NSSO found that only 14 per cent of Indian business establishments are run by females. Most of the women-run businesses – 79 per cent – were self-financed.

In the 2017 Index of Women Entrepreneurs by MasterCard, India ranked 49th out of 54 countries. Women entrepreneurs have no role models and have had no coaching on how to start, run and build a business. Study estimates that closing the gender entrepreneurship gap worldwide could grow global GDP by as much as 2%.

Women need the 3Cs: Confidence, Capabilities, access to Capital. Men need to understand that women are their equals. There is a need to do much more in India in order to put Indian women entrepreneurs first.

Public and private sectors must collaborate to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to “harness the untapped potential” of women entrepreneurs. Educate and empower women to become entrepreneurs. Ensure adequate financial resources to support their entrepreneurial ventures. Provide mentoring to promote success in entrepreneurship.

In US there is a non-profit organisation called Service Core of Retired Executives (SCORE) that provides free mentoring services to business owners. India could establish a programme similar to SCORE dedicated to women entrepreneurs. It could recruit both retired and active professionals from business, government, academia, non-profit – to be mentors in the programme.

Stressing not only “book learning” but also providing the hands-on skills and abilities required to run a business. Women should enter fields in which there are too few female business owners today, such as IT, manufacturing, and engineering.

India should tie into and develop a programme to replicate World Bank’s Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi). We need a policy that supports the modern working family.

Improve efficiency in public expenditure and increase investments in infrastructure. If Indian women entrepreneurs are put first, they will dramatically accelerate the country’s economic development in a manner that will benefit all and put India first.

The 8th edition of the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES) is held in Hyderabad. The summit is being hosted by NITI Aayog in partnership with US government. The theme for this year’s Summit is “Women First, Prosperity for All.”

The Summit is being held in India for the first time. Having equal gender representation is a financial positive to businesses today besides being a social responsibility.

Entrepreneurship is a less desirable career choice in India when compared to its peers in Brazil, China and South Africa. According to a survey, only 39.3 per cent in India think entrepreneurship as a good career choice.

Major constraints for entrepreneurship development in India include lack of funds, government regulation and complex tax structures, entrepreneurial education at primary and secondary school levels, and culture and social norms.

Poor infrastructure and basic services are the biggest barrier to entrepreneurship. However, Indian entrepreneurs have progressed in areas such as IT, media and entertainment, and health-care and life sciences.

There is significant potential to harness the untapped potential of women’s entrepreneurship in India. Stand-up India scheme provides loans from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore to women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs from SC/ST. MUDRA scheme to provide easy finance to entrepreneurs.

‘Make in India’ programme to facilitate investment, foster innovation, enhance skill development, & build best in class manufacturing infrastructure. SETU (Self-Employment and Talent Utilization) which will strengthen all prospects of startups, and other self-employment initiatives.

Various labour reforms to boost job creation and entrepreneurship. World Bank has launched a Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) to provide venture capital support to women.
DNA barcoding is an emerging science of molecular taxonomy.

DNA barcoding uses a gene or DNA sequence to identify an organism as belonging to a particular species, much like the barcode printed on a product in a shop.

There is a need for genetic classification of the rich biological resources.

To correctly identify similarities within a species.

DNA barcodes reveal adulteration in traditional medicines which contain spurious plant extracts.

Studies show that traditional medicinal markets are filled with unrelated plant materials that substitute for endangered or rare ones.

DNA bar-coding can prevent mislabelling of processed seafood.

Scientists have developed a portable DNA barcoding kit which makes rapid species identification possible within a few hours.

This improves our capacity to care for the species that provide essential ecosystem services.

Many threatened animals and plants are trafficked out of developing countries. DNA barcoding kit can help in rapid detection, and successful prosecution.

It reduces the cost of adopting DNA analysis infrastructure and by simplifying usage of DNA analysis tools.

Usage of DNA barcoding in wildlife forensics and detection of invasive species.

Tackling socio-economic challenges such as agricultural pests and invasive disease vectors.

Barcoding can be used for monitoring water quality to ensure safe supply of drinking water.

Barcoding can identify a species from bits and pieces, including undesirable animal or plant material in processed foodstuffs.

To speed identification of known organisms and facilitate rapid recognition of new species.

A library of barcodes linked to named specimens will enhance public access to biological knowledge.

Freshwater Biology Regional Centre, Hyderabad has established a state of art DNA Bar-coding laboratory with special grant from MoEF&CC.

Centre for DNA barcoding of life forms in Kerala and the Western Ghats region.

Need for a policy framework which includes setting up of laboratories that use DNA-based tools and a quality assurance certification for raw products in herbal markets.

Without systemic quality control, there will be a negative impact on the perception of Ayurveda.

Governments must implement DNA bar-coding of processed seafoods and other processed food items.

Construction of the barcode library and build the infrastructure needed to use it in real-world situations.

Creating awareness and promoting further research on DNA Barcoding.
China's new appetite to demonstrate regional leadership in India's traditional sphere of influence. China's credibility in financing, building, delivering and managing mega projects in South Asia provides Beijing's a clear edge over India. This is seen as more confident Chinese diplomacy in addressing regional problems. 

India too has similar interests to protect. India's construction of a deepwater port at Sittwe. Its Kaladan multimodal transport project. Peace in the Northeastern region. Its image as the world's largest democracy with an exemplary record of hosting refugees. All these call for a serious rethink on India's engagement with the Rohingya crisis.

India's has missed another opportunity to China's decisive and proactive diplomacy. While India has described 40,000 Rohingyas in India as 'illegal migrants' who must be deported. Supreme Court declared them a threat to national security.

China Mediating in Rohingya Crisis

Introduction

China's Three-stage Solution

Concerns for India

India's interests in Myanmar

China's interests in Myanmar

Flaws in the agreement / Challenges

Way Forward

China, which has historically been wary of stepping into domestic conflicts in other countries, is being proactive in the Rohingya crisis. A military operation by Myanmar in Rakhine resulted in around 600,000 Rohingyas fleeing the province to Bangladesh. Now China has stepped in with its three-point plan.

Myanmar and Bangladesh must hold bilateral talks and reach a repatriation agreement -- which has been achieved. Declaration of ceasefire in Rakhine to halt further displacement and bringing immediate relief to the state's devastated Rohingya. China will provide economic assistance for the development of the Rakhine region and asking the international community to help develop the Rakhine state.

Details of the agreement, including the number of Rohingya who will be sent back, and the timeline, have not been revealed. It is not clear whether the refugees themselves want to go back to a place they had fled in such unsafe circumstances. It is also not clear where they will be resettled. An immediate ceasefire in Rakhine to halt further displacement as mentioned in the agreement hasn't been declared yet. There is no indication so far, that a resettlement plan is taking shape.

China sees the Rohingya crisis as an economic problem, given that its solution is centred on development. Beijing enjoys good relations with both Bangladesh and Myanmar. China has emerged as a major investor in both Bangladesh and Myanmar. Rakhine is an important link in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

China is building a $7.3 billion deep-water port in the Rakhine province and has invested $2.45 billion to build an oil and gas pipeline connecting coastal Rakhine to Yunnan. China has put pressure on Myanmar because conflict in Rakhine will be against Beijing's economic interests.