Gender Equality is central to inclusive economic growth and is critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Pink is the colour of the Economic Survey 2017-18, signifying the support and promotion of the growing movement to target and end violence against women and to promote women’s rights.

To enable women to participate fully in society and contribute to the health and prosperity of the society.

It is estimated that India can potentially boost its GDP by $700 billion by 2025, by raising female labour-force participation rate.

Gender equality contributes to growth by raising the female-to-male ratio of labor-force participation, increasing women’s work hours, and having more women working in higher-productivity sectors.

Equality at work goes hand in hand with gender equality in society.

Economically empowered women boost demand, have healthier and better-educated children, and raise human development levels.

Enabling her to lead a life of dignity.

Preventing their socio-economic exploitation and lowers domestic violence.

Enhancing a woman’s control over household decision-making.

Gender Inequality

Women remain subject to traditional attitudes that define their primary role as being in the home.

Women often lack access to the financing needed to start or expand a business.

Globally, the value of women’s unpaid work performed is three times higher than that of men, whereas in the Asia-Pacific region, it is four times higher.

Unconscious bias in the workplace.

Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India.

More than 50 percent of women have no valuable assets to their name.

India has a lower share of women’s contribution to the GDP than the global average.

Women face great physical insecurity.

Crimes against women such as rapes, dowry deaths, and honour killings.

A culturally ingrained parental preference for sons — emanating from their importance as caregivers for parents in old age.

Concerns / Challenges

Declining child sex ratio (CSR), the practice of gender-biased sex selection, and child marriage.

Domestic violence against women is also high.

Women being exposed to violence by their partners.

Judicial remedies or police reforms, though absolutely necessary, are mostly curative, rather than being preventive.

Benefits like maternity leave or related facilities will not be accessible to her in the informal sector.

The private sector and business community will be crucial in helping bridge the gap between skills and jobs and enable access to decent work for women.

Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities.

Companies can also invest in women entrepreneurs through microfinance, and bring their goods and services into supply chains.

Enhancing women’s access to the internet and ICT can create a market of connected women who can be linked to business opportunities.

Increasing representation of women in the public spheres is important.

Female leaders serve as role models and raise educational and career aspirations for adolescent girls and their parents.

Attitudinal shift is essential for women to be considered equal within their homes and in broader society.

Educating Indian children from an early age about the importance of gender equality.

More flexible workplace policies, affordable childcare, and expanded skills training, particularly in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

Investment in infrastructure and transportation can reap dividends by connecting more women to productive work opportunities.

Address women’s under-representation in business leadership circles.

Changing social attitudes about gender roles.

Dismantling several barriers, like women should prioritise childcare over their careers.

There are views that “when a mother works for pay, the children suffer”. Government, business, the media, and individual communities need to work together to change such views.

Improve women’s access to digital technology, which can open countless economic (and social) doors—including into finance.

Asia-Pacific countries could come together to provide more financing for gender-equality initiatives, and to encourage more gender-based investment and budgeting.

Now is the time to accelerate progress toward gender parity, and to women’s power to deliver growth and improve social well-being.

Potential Areas of Focus

Why Gender Equality?

Introducing

Way Forward

Gender Equality in India
Blockchain is a secure, digitised and distributed ledger to store records. Anything recorded on them cannot be deleted, and is instantly uploaded to all users on that blockchain.

Blockchain was originally developed as an accounting system for the cryptocurrency Bitcoin, is being researched across the banking and financial services industries.

The blockchain ledger has several advantages over traditional databases.

- It is more transparent and secure as any changes to the ledger can be made only with the approval of all stakeholders.
- The records in the ledger are distributed among the stakeholders and not stored in a centralised database.
- Blockchain removes the need for using a trusted third party such as a bank to make a transaction by directly connecting the customers and suppliers.
- Transaction time is reduced.
- Blockchain's ability to enhance real-time visibility in the functioning of the supply chain can prevent leakages, and thereby increase efficiency.
- It provides an opportunity for technology start-ups to develop and use the technology for diverse applications.

Bitcoin is just one of the applications for the technology, whose use is being tested across industries.

- Healthcare, banking, education, agriculture, electricity distribution and land records are sectors that could benefit.
- Blockchain-powered smart contracts, where every piece of information is recorded can enhance ease of doing business.
- It will augment the credibility, accuracy and efficiency of a contract while reducing the risk of frauds, substantially.
- Blockchain could play a crucial part in health insurance claims management by reducing the risk of insurance claim frauds.
- The technology can also be used to prevent the sale of spurious drugs in the country by tracking every step of the supply chain network.
- Artificial Intelligence and Internet of Things (IoT) can gain immensely from blockchain applications.
- In an IoT world, thousands of devices would need to rapidly and seamlessly transact with each other in real time.
- The adoption of blockchain by India's banks could help avert frauds such as the one at Punjab National Bank as the technology updates information across all users simultaneously.
- It could be used to further strengthen our national institutions, including the judiciary and the Election Commission.
- Critical citizen information like land records, census data, birth and death records, business licenses, criminal records, intellectual property registry, electoral rolls could all be maintained as blockchain-powered, tamper-proof public ledgers.

Blockchain Technology

- The massive usage of energy for the functioning of blockchain.
- Safeguarding the privacy of individuals and companies as blockchains are usually open ledgers for everyone to see.
- Knowledge of the benefits of distributed ledger technology is still limited.
- Blockchain technology is expensive to initially put it in place.

Concerns / Challenges

- Blockchain, with all its possibilities, needs a serious look at its vulnerabilities and commerciality.
- Before introducing blockchain into the public sector data-handling system, we need a robust and informative data repository.
- Linking IndiaChain with Aadhar, thus creating a secure personal identity for all Indians.
- Proper regulations for the use of blockchain technology in the country.
- Identifying and resolving key issues and challenges in implementing this technology, the prime amongst those being data privacy.

Applications

- India should effectively channel its technical human capital surplus to position itself as one of the pioneers during this upcoming wave of innovation.

Government's Efforts

- 'IndiaChain' - Niti Aayog's ambitious project to develop a nation-wide blockchain network.
- When implemented it will be the world's largest blockchain implementation programme in governance.
- Several State governments including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra are using the technology for their e-governance initiatives.
- The Andhra Pradesh government is leading the way in blockchain adoption in land records and transport.
- Globally, blockchain technology has proven to be a change-maker.
- In Russia, blockchain-based systems are being pursued for land registry management as well as for improving the local voting system.
- The Dubai government is on its way to implement blockchain-based paperless digital systems in visa applications, licence renewals and bill payments.
- Estonia's eHealth Foundation is using a blockchain-based system to process and store patient health records.

International Examples

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Way Forward

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India should effectively channel its technical human capital surplus to position itself as one of the pioneers during this upcoming wave of innovation.
We are facing many challenges despite not giving credence to the caste census. Patels, Gujjars, Jats and Marathas are demanding reservations. Karnataka elections centres around Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities. Similar situation exists in several states. Land ownership that strengthened the power of upper castes has lost its hold now. Land fragmentation and decades of agricultural stagnation have turned many upper caste landowners into marginal farmers. Rising rural wages, particularly construction wages and social security schemes have now placed the Dalits and OBCs in a better position. National Sample Survey (NSS) data shows that poverty persists among forward castes.

India Human Development Survey shows that 56% of Dalit children ages 8-11 cannot read but neither can 32% of forward caste and 47% of OBC children.

Creating a Caste-based political mobilisation needs strong sentiments for or against reservations. Caste does play a role in elections in terms of vote banks.

Impact of Caste Data on Society

Caste-based census will give rise to caste division. Collection of caste data is not easy. Difficulty in ascertaining the correctness of the caste claimed by a person.

Sometimes the same caste is spelt in different ways. Some individuals report their jati and others upajati making it difficult to create mutually exclusive categories.

We have nearly three years before the Census of 2021. We have data from the SECC and technologies like Artificial Intelligence and machine learning. We have other data sources such as matrimonial advertisements and State-specific Scheduled Castes/OBC lists. We can condense them into meaningful categories via machine learning tools. These categories could be validated by domain experts from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) institutions in various States. This gives us district-specific list of castes.

Respondents can then be allowed to self-identify from the pre-coded list. However, the government must go beyond caste and work for the upliftment of illiterate, marginalised and poor section of population. The government should give more importance to economic division, education, health etc.

Way Forward

Caste Census in Colonial Time

First Census in 1871, included questions about caste. This data was then used to divide and conquer India.

It first privileged Brahmins as interpreters of Indian culture and then targeted them as the root of caste-based oppression and inequality.

This classification was also a source of anti-Brahmin movements of 20th century. It generated a conception of community as a homogeneous and classifiable community and thereby influenced the processes of political representation.

Post-Independence Censuses have shied away from including questions about caste.


Caste is a social reality which determines one’s social status and the limits of the social relations and also opportunities for advancement in the life of an individual.

Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 was the first-ever caste-based census since 1931 Census of India.

There are demands for collection of caste data in 2021 Census.

It is important to understand the implications that caste data would have in the country.

Hasty inclusion of the caste question in the SECC has resulted in largely unusable data.

If we want information regarding the size and characteristics of various castes in India, we must look to the Census of 1931.

This does not address the change and requirement of present time.

Caste data will help to identify various backward and downtrodden classes.

It will give authentic information regarding the socio-economic condition and education status of various castes.

It would help government identify beneficiaries for various socio-economic welfare schemes.

Without accurate data of thousands of jatis (castes) and upajatis (subcastes), it is difficult to infer the accuracy of the caste-based political decisions.

Some jatis may have managed to pull themselves out poverty and marginalisation, while others may have sunk into it.

Data on caste can be used to rationalise reservation policies.

This data will strengthen the democratic system and help to uplift a particular caste and in future there will hopefully be a casteless society.

Therefore it is time to collect data that reflects the current situation.
India is the largest democratic country in the world. Democracy is defined as a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Important issues like horse-trading in politics, the anti-defection law, pros and cons of post-poll alliances and discretionary powers of the governor has brought to light the various challenges facing Indian democracy. Regional parties gaining importance across states.

We have moved towards multi-party system, with fractured mandates becoming the norm. Another issue is that of the discretionary powers of the governor.

Government formation now seems to be like who approaches the governor the fastest to stake claim to form the government.

The issue of office of profit.

Migration causing low voter turnout.

Freebies given by political parties during elections.

Four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court held a press conference and raised a banner of revolt against the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Disruptions in parliament. The duration for which Parliament meets in India, compared with other democracies, is short.

Illiteracy, Poverty, Gender Discrimination, Casteism, Communalism, Religious Fundamentalism, Regionalism, Corruption, and Criminalization of Politics. Anti-Defection law does not seem to be doing much to stop MLAs from defecting.

This is primarily because MLAs are offered back-door entry to assemblies by rival parties.

Ethics of post-poll alliances.

Unlike pre-poll alliances, where the voters are aware of whom they are voting for, post-poll alliances present a new set of challenges.

The post-poll alliance is seen as a betrayal of the trust of the voters by many.

Misuse of data on social media sites, privacy of users and the power of social media to influence important political outcomes.

The indiscriminate use of exemption for the office of profit.

For instance same posts are exempt from the purview of office of profit in some states, while they are deemed as office of profit in others.

While there are posts of parliamentary secretaries in several states, such posts were denied to Delhi and some states.

Dynastic politics, lack of strong opposition at the centre and Religion based politics.

Ex: Government's decision to classify Lingayats as a religious minority in Karnataka.

The delay in disposal of cases by the courts is a concern to people.
Child Adoption in India

Adoption means the process through which the adopted child becomes the lawful child of his adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that are attached to a biological child.

An inter-ministerial panel headed by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has cleared a proposal making district magistrates the final authority to clear child adoption cases.

It is to quicken the adoption process that is often hit by year-long delays.

At present, prospective adoptive parents have to go to civil or family courts to get the final go-ahead after completing all other formalities related to adoption.

With high pendency of cases in civil and family courts, it is not easy to get a date for hearing.

Now it requires an amendment to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 for allowing district magistrate to pass the adoption order.

800 to 850 adoption cases are pending in civil and family courts at any given time.

Though the Juvenile Justice law mandates that courts have to dispose of adoption cases within two months from the date of filing of application, it rarely happen.

There are cases that have been pending for more than a year also.

There are cases where it takes over two years to complete the process of adoption.

There are more district courts, thereby handling lesser number of cases than civil courts.

Survey shows that there are over 50,000 orphans in the country. The adoption continues to be low because of the delay in getting legal clearances.

The move to empower district magistrates (DMs) would bring down the time to approve adoption cases to two months.

The DM is on the ground implementing the adoption process.

The Child Welfare Committees, which does the verification of prospective parents, comes under DM.

So source verification and other processes can get completed much faster under DMs.

Apart from encouraging more people to adopt, the move will bring huge psychological and physical benefits for the adopted child.

Children who are adopted at young ages can even gain enough to overcome any nutritional disadvantages they may have suffered in the womb.

Developing into healthy and productive adults will contribute to India’s growth story.
Child Labour in India

**Introduction**
- "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." – Nelson Mandela.
- Child labour typically means the employment of children in any manual work with or without payment.
- Child labour is a deep-rooted problem in India.

**Reasons**
- **Poverty**
  - The main reason for child labour is poverty.
  - Poverty forces families to push their children to work for a living.

- **Lack of educational resources**
  - There are instances where children are deprived of their fundamental right to education.
  - There are areas with no proper facilities of education.

- **Social and economic backwardness**
  - Lack of affordable schools for poor children leaves them illiterate and helpless which push them into the trap of child labour.
  - Due to illiteracy, many times parents are not aware of various information and schemes for child education.

- **Disease or Disability**
  - In many families, due to disease or disability, there is no earning, and the child’s wages are the sole means of family’s sustenance.

- **Poor compliance of laws**
  - In the absence of proper compliance of the laws, child labour is continuing.
  - It can be prohibited only by strict adherence to the related laws.

- **Lure of cheap labour**
  - Some shopkeepers, companies and factory owners employ children so that they have to pay less to them.
  - With the development of globalization, privatization, and consumerist culture, the need for cheap labour and its linkage with economic needs of poor families have encouraged child labour.

- **Discrimination between boys and girls**
  - Even today some believe that girls are weaker and there is no equal comparison between boys and girls.
  - Considering girls weaker than boys deprives them of school and education.
  - In labourer families, girls are found to be engaged in labour along with their parents.

**Facts for Prelims**
- June 12 is observed worldwide as World Day Against Child Labour.
- The International Labour Organisation launched this day in 2002 to tackle the global issue of child labour.
- India ratified core ILO conventions 138 and 182 on Child Labour to fight against the menace and achieve the objective of child labour-free nation.

**How to eradicate child labour?**
- Educate parents of child workers
- Work with NGOs
- Report cases of child working
- Not employing children as house help
- Awareness about the existing laws
- Fund a poor child’s education
- People who employ children must be informed about The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act of 2015 which could land them in prison.
- People can either join such an organisation or assist the NGO.
- We must refrain from employing them and make efforts to help them get an education.
- People can fund a child’s education.
- Donate funds to organisations that help underprivileged kids.
- More robust and stricter laws for child labour, so that the people fear from employing any child labour.
- The common man should take up a resolve that he will not buy any items from the shops where a child is employed as labour.
- Say No to the use of something made of child labour. This can bring a big change in our society.

**Spread awareness about child labour, so that people can understand that child labour is against the future of the country.**

**Persuading owners to refrain from employing kids under 18 years.**

**Reporting such cases to the police so that necessary legal action can be taken.**

**Parents must be educated about the importance of education in a child’s life.**

**As well as the various government initiatives to help underprivileged kids study free of cost.**

**A large number of NGOs actively work to rehabilitate and save children from being trafficked into child labour.**

**People can either join such an organisation or assist the NGO.**

**We must refrain from employing them and make efforts to help them get an education.**

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Agriculture growth is under stress at 3.4 per cent in 2017-18 compared with 6.3 per cent in 2016-17.

The government recently came out with a Model Contract Farming Act, 2018 with an intent to increase farmers’ income by creating an alternative market mechanism that links them to national and international markets.

Contract farming refers to a system in which bulk purchasers, including agro-processing, exporting and trading units, enter into contracts with farmer(s) to purchase a specified quantity of any agricultural commodity at a pre-agreed price.

The contracting firm also known as the sponsor provides all production support to the contracted farmers, including extension services with full protection of land rights.

Contract farming enhances market linkages and reduces dependence on middlemen.

Integrate farmers with bulk purchasers including exporters, agro-industries etc.

Since the factories will be next to clusters of farms, wastages will be very largely eliminated.

Better price realization through mitigation of market and price risks to the farmers.

It facilitates better access to technology, crop diversification, extension services, financing and crop insurance.

Farmers no need to transport their produce to the mandis, as sponsors usually collect the produce from the farm gate.

This reduces farmers’ cost and, thereby, translates into increased incomes.

Ensures smooth agro raw material supply to the agro industries.

Food-processing will get a boost as an employment generator.

Encourage the new generation to take up farming instead of migrating to cities.

Rural women, instead of being employed as farm labourers will work in sorting and grading of fruits and vegetables.

It also gives farmers an alternative in cases where the procurement mechanism is ineffective.

Contract farming can be detrimental by encouraging large monoculture farming.

Dependency of farmers on companies for seeds and equipment also needs to be looked at.

Contracting firms can exploit monopoly situation to their advantage by offering lower prices to farmers.

High incidence of conflicts in some places between the farmer and the procuring entity on quality/quantity of produce as well as a high risk of post-harvest losses.

Being a State subject, operationalizing agriculture reforms needs State cooperation. Most often, these reforms fall victim to Centre-States political differences.
The task of preserving the forests and landscapes are mostly taken up by the indigenous communities. The Adivasi communities organising to save ancestral forests, and the Lepcha fighting to protect the upper reaches of the Teesta.

The urban middle class is not visible in environmentalism, other than in 'beautification projects'.

India does not take the lead on cross-border environmentalism.

The destruction of Siwalik range of Nepal for the construction industry's demand for boulders and conglomerate, leads to greater floods, desertification and aquifer depletion.

Air pollution is high in Lahore, New Delhi, Kathmandu and Dhaka, but there is no collaboration.

Wildlife corridors across States, provinces and countries are narrowing day by day.

The environment ministry is invariably the least empowered in the major countries of South Asia and unable to coordinate the ecological response.

De-silting a deep reservoir when it fills up with sand and mud.

The climate change discourse has not evolved enough to address the 'climate refugees' who move to national boundaries in the search for survival.

Eg: Farakka Barrage affected the livelihoods of downstream Bangladesh, causing the flood of 'undocumented aliens' in India.

Rising consumerism

India being the host country for 2018 World Environment Day, it is time for New Delhi to rise to connect the dots between representative democracy and ecological sanity.

India is the largest nation-state of the region, and the biggest polluter. India should take the lead role in cross border environmentalism.

Governments must consider environmental protection as synonymous with wildlife protection.

Need for civic participation for sustainability.

The activists must work to quantify the economic losses of environmental destruction and get local institutions to act on their ownership of natural resources.

The activists must harness information technology so as to engage with the public.

Empowerment of local government all over.

Elected representatives in cities and districts must emerge as the bulwark of environmentalism.

Ecological ruin is at fastest pace across South Asia, affecting the life and livelihood of nearly a quarter of the world’s population.

The distress is paramount in the northern half of the subcontinent.

The emerging environmental concerns make cross-border environmentalism crucial for South Asia.

On water, the subcontinent is running out of the resource due to the demands of industrialisation and urbanisation.

Continuation of the colonial-era irrigation model based on flooding the fields.

Ganga in Uttarakhand and the Teesta of Sikkim has been converted into dry boulder tracts by 'cascades' of run-of-river hydroelectric schemes.

The natural drainage is destroyed by highways and railway tracks.

Urban/industrial effluents have converted our great rivers into sewers.

Rivers carry hundreds of tonnes of plastics daily into the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.

The underground aquifers are exploited to exhaustion.

The retreat of the Himalayan glaciers is threatening the perennial nature of our rivers.

Cloud of ‘black carbon’ containing soot and smog by stubble burning, wood fires, smokestacks and fossil fuel exhaust settles on Himalayan snow and ice, which absorb heat and melt much faster.

The icefalls of the Himalaya could transform into waterfalls.

The ground level fog engulfs the subcontinent’s northern plains for extended periods in winter.

To save our common ground across borders.

Because wildlife, disease vectors, aerosols and river flows across national boundaries.

One country’s pollution can quickly become another country’s environmental and economic crisis.

Therefore the environmental trends must be discussed at the inter-country level.

As the largest nation-state of our region, India needs to be alert to the dangerous drift.

Climate change is introducing massive disturbances to South Asia, most notably from the rise of sea levels.

The entire Indian Ocean coastline will be affected.

The hardest hit will be the densely populated deltas where the Indus, the Irrawaddy and the Ganga-Brahmaputra meet the sea.
ABHY is a Central Sector Scheme with a total outlay of Rs. 6,000 Crore and implemented with World Bank assistance. It aims to improve ground water management in priority areas in the country through community participation over a period of five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

The priority areas identified fall in Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These states represent about 25% of the total number of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical blocks. Implementation of the scheme is expected to benefit nearly 8,350 ‘Gram Panchayats’ in 78 districts in these states. Funds under the scheme will be made available to the participating states as grants.

Managing water resources is the key to create a water-secure future. Strengthening the institutions responsible for ground water governance. Encouraging community involvement for improving ground water management. Behavioural changes that promote conservation and adoption of efficient water use practices to reduce ground water use for irrigation. Focus on infrastructure development including building recharge structure/facilities for utilising rain water.

Monitoring and disseminating ground water data and water budgeting. Need to revise current water-quality monitoring programs in India and re-evaluate human health risks in areas of high uranium prevalence. Exploring new ways to prevent or treat uranium contamination will help ensure access to safe drinking water. More efficient irrigation, growing less water-intensive crops in the dry season. Improvement in the industry’s water efficiency is essential.

Solar desalination, wastewater management and groundwater recharge for improving water security. The low stress levels in West Bengal display the importance of state legislation to address groundwater depletion. Curbing extensive groundwater withdrawals will require limiting agricultural electricity subsidies provided by state governments and rationing of power.

Training farmers on water conservation practices. The commonly observed contaminants include arsenic, fluoride, nitrate and iron, which are geogenic in nature. Other contaminants include bacteria, phosphates and heavy metals which are a result of human activities including domestic sewage, agricultural practices and industrial effluents.

The WHO has set a provisional safe drinking water standard of 30 micrograms of uranium per litre for India. While the primary source of uranium is geogenic, anthropogenic factors such as groundwater table decline and nitrate pollution may further enhance uranium mobilisation. Fundamental right to water has been evolved by the Supreme Court and various High Courts as part of ‘Right to Life’ under Article 21 of the Constitution.

India is the world’s largest user of groundwater. Groundwater is a primary source of drinking water and irrigation in India. Over the past three decades, India has been grappling with intense and rapid depletion of groundwater. According to the assessment of the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), total 1,034 out of 5,584 assessed blocks in the country are over-exploited.

Groundwater in India is severely contaminated with uranium higher than the WHO standard. Uranium has yet not been included in the list of contaminants monitored under the Bureau of Indian Standards’ Drinking Water Specifications. Consumption of drinking water contaminated with uranium can cause chronic kidney disease, deformity of bones and liver. High salinity, fluoride, and nitrate make them unsuitable for human consumption.

Green Revolution caused over use of ground water. Successive droughts and erratic rainfall have led to excess extraction of groundwater. Transition to water-intensive crops and spate of construction activity along catchment areas. Farmers are digging more and more borewells.

Cities like Bengaluru are losing its capacity to recharge groundwater as the number of water bodies like lakes has reduced by 79%. Government policies of power subsidies and irrigation equipment credits for farmers have contributed to the overexploitation of groundwater. Existing rules on groundwater access that give landowners the right to pump on their land.

Commercial establishments like shopping malls, hotels, hospitals and high-rise apartments are using borewells in large number to meet the demand for the occupants. The World Bank predicts that by 2032, around 60 per cent of aquifers in the country will be in a critical state. The severity of the problem is acute in the northwest.

Most of Punjab and Haryana, northern areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and parts of Uttar Pradesh face continued groundwater level declines. As climate change alters the Indian monsoon, the stresses on India’s groundwater resources may increase. Groundwater depletion has severe consequences on India’s water security, food security, health and the livelihoods of its population.

India's Groundwater Management

Introduction

Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)

Way Forward

Present Crisis

India's Groundwater Management

Facts for Prelims

Reasons for Groundwater Decline

Severity of the problem
India towards a Developed Country

Introduction

India has been categorised in the emerging economy group for the last several years.

The SBI report has said India has only 10 years to change its status into a developed country and will need to focus on education, failing which the ‘demographic dividend’ will turn into a disadvantage.

If India is not able to get its act together, it will never be able to go into the developed group of nations.

If India’s youth isn’t given adequate skills and opportunities, then the “demographic dividend” will become a huge disadvantage by 2030.

Way Forward

India has crores of youngsters with low skills unsuited to the economy.

The right to education does not translate into a right to quality education.

In India the focus is on acquisition of knowledge and not on application of knowledge.

Shortage of quality teachers across the country which is depriving quality education.

Attitude towards mastering pre existing knowledge and not creating new knowledge.

With technological advancement, conventional jobs are squeezed.

Low funding leading to a major roadblock in the implementation of infrastructure projects.

Universal literacy i.e. education for all, poverty alleviation, elimination of gender discrimination, removal of regional imbalances, administrative and judicial reforms and sustained economic, social and environmental development.

Communal Harmony, equality of opportunity, fairness of elections, better distribution of power among central, state and local governments, strong values and ethics.

India must invest a lot in education, health and child nutrition so that the human resource is qualitatively superior.

Both the Centre and the States need to increase their budget on health and education.

Emphasis on quality education and health in the government schools, colleges and state-run hospitals and primary health care centres must be given.

Enforcing quality standards in higher education.

Focusing on the learning outcomes in the school education.

Rising inequality must be properly monitored and addressed.

When public finances are put into infrastructure investments, we can attract private funds.

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

Recommendations made in the Report

The government and policymakers will have to focus on the young people to ensure they become good citizens.

India will need to dramatically improve education and skill development outcomes in the next decade.

The need of the hour is to improve the overall situation of government schools across states.

Diversion of funds earmarked for private schools to government schools, for the purpose of upgrading facilities and infrastructure.

Need for better classrooms and more focus on making English as a medium of teaching.

Qualified teachers with better remuneration.
India's Role

Today India plays a key role in the Pacific, East Asia and Southeast Asia.

'Act East Policy' is aimed at substantial improvement of India's relations with Southeast Asia.

India is also trying to make innovative use of trade and diplomacy as its strategic arsenals.

Maintaining regional stability.

Strong ties with the US are seen as a vital tool for enhancing India's strategic posture.

For the long-term vision of national interest.

China's increasingly active presence in the Indian Ocean region as well as its efforts to expand geopolitical reach in Asia and beyond by the use of trade and military.

In the present time, the control of sea lanes and ports would be the game changer.

China seems to have taken the lead with its geopolitical project—the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI).

For adhering to freedom of navigation, adherence to rules-based order and stable trade environment.

For free sea and air lanes, connectivity and upholding international rules and norms.

China is keeping a close watch at India's engagement through strategic dialogues, military exercises and security agreements with many Indo-Pacific countries.

China's military build-up in the South China Sea and its sweeping territorial claims across the strategic waterway.

ASEAN must form the geographic core to any Indo-Pacific architecture.

India must increase its strategic alignment with the US in order to balance the security concerns emanating from China's aggressive stance.

Build-up of India's naval capabilities, if India has to emerge as one of the main players in the Indo-Pacific.

Freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law will make our sea lanes the pathway to prosperity.

Why Indo-Pacific region?

Indo-Pacific balance at Shangri-La

Concerns / Challenges

Indo-Pacific Framework

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Address

The Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) is an inter-governmental security forum held annually by an independent think tank, the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The Shangri-La Dialogue has evolved into a key strategic gathering of the Asia-Pacific region.

It is attended by defense ministers, permanent heads of ministries and military chiefs of Asia-Pacific states.

Much more so than in 2017, the Indian Ocean loomed large over 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue.

The keynote address by Prime Minister Narendra Modi proved an important opportunity to highlight India's perspectives on regional security dynamics.

The main message was his articulation of India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region.

The idea of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic space is an outgrowth of China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

It signifies the interconnectedness of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the importance of the oceans to security and commerce.

Indo-Pacific is a "natural region" ranging "from the shores of Africa to that of the America."

Increasing use of the term Indo-Pacific recognises India's centrality to global influences.

A "stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific Region" is an 'important pillar' of India's strategic partnership with the United States.

The emphasis shown by the US on the 'Indo-Pacific' can be termed as its strategic initiative towards India.

The Pentagon has already begun using the new term in US official documents.

The US military has renamed its Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command.

This shows the rising significance of India in America's strategic calculations.

ASEAN is one of the crucial building blocks of the Indo-Pacific.

United States, India, Japan, and Australia — the "Quad" group — is emphasizing "Indo-Pacific" as a new strategic space.
Differences in work culture may often come in the way.
The width and depth of field experience which the civil services provide is not available with outside talent.

Interests and motivation vary from person to person. Therefore, short term entry of officers through lateral entry might lead to corrupt practices.

The private sector who ran Air India, Indian Airlines and Vayudoot proved to be failures.

Lateral entry into civil services undermines reservation policy.

If a person from a private infrastructure company is appointed in an infra ministry it will lead to questions of morality, ethics and conflict of interest.

Lack of transparency, honesty and political interference in the selection process.

Nobody knows why a particular individual was selected and why others more qualified were left out.

It is difficult to assess the performance of a secretary to the government due to complex nature of the job. So it would be difficult to measure the performance of lateral entrants.

If the selection is politically motivated, it may degrade the system.

Lateral entry shouldn’t lead to politicisation of bureaucracy.

Government must also allow deputation of its officers to private sector as well so that they get exposure to market practices and fresh ideas.

A good managerial system encourages and nurtures talent from within instead of seeking to induct leadership from outside.

The remedy lies not through lateral induction but through more rigorous performance appraisal and improved personnel management.

The government can consider lateral entry to head certain mission-mode projects and public-sector entities where private-sector expertise actually matters.

The process of selection needs to be transparent.

A credible statutory agency like UPSC should be entrusted with the responsibility of recruitment.

Arguments against Lateral Entry

The Union government has invited applications for 10 Joint Secretary level positions through lateral entry.

Civil servants enter public service as generalists and have grassroots realities.

Building specific domain expertise starts quite late for career bureaucrats.

Economic and governance changes since 1991 require quick decision making.

The private sector implementing big ticket projects, subject experts with industry-academia interface and managerial talent that governments must bank on.

IAS monopolies in ministries like home, S&T, sports, etc and other cadres must also be considered.

To bring in “fresh ideas and new approaches to governance”.

The present system of ‘frequent and arbitrary transfers’ hinder gaining of the relevant experience by incumbent officers.

Expert advice and opinion for efficient administration and fulfilling the aspirations of people.

Lateral entry into finance ministry produced illustrious public servants like Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Vijay Kelkar.

They bring in a vast number of fresh & vibrant ideas.

Outside talent from the private sector is more likely to be target-oriented, which will improve the performance of the government.

When civil servants are made to compete with outside talent, the lethargic attitude will diminish and induce competition within the system.

More competition will encourage career civil servants to develop expertise.

NITI Ayog’s experience with lateral entry has been extremely good.

Lateral entry was recommended by Administrative Reforms Commission and various other expert groups.

The ARC highlights that performance appraisals may be adopted from the armed forces, which could aid in weeding out non-performers.

In the armed forces, only 3 per cent of officers make it to the grade of brigadier and above — and promotions are based entirely on merit, which fuels excellence.
According to the Ministry of Law and Justice, government departments are a party to around "46 percent" of court cases. Excessive litigation crowds out the private citizen from the court system. Government litigation crowds out the private citizen from the court system.

**Legal Information Management and Briefing System (LIMBS)**

**Legal Information Management and Briefing System (LIMBS)** is a web based application created by the Department of Legal Affairs under the Ministry of Law and Justice. The idea is to make the legal data available at one single point and streamline the procedure of litigation matters conducted on behalf of Union of India.

**Introduction**

The idea is to make the legal data available at one single point and streamline the procedure of litigation matters conducted on behalf of Union of India.

**Background**

It is in line with Digital India to digitalise the details of court cases and bring various stakeholders on a single platform.

**Way Forward**

Earlier, information about cases involving 64 ministries/departments was scattered in different places, typically, in the form of physical files. That information is now available on a single platform, in electronic form.

**Tackling Government Litigation**

LIMBS involves civil cases. It should be extended to criminal cases also.

At present it is for the Union government, the idea must be extended to state governments also.

LIMBS is in its infancy. To make the working of the government more coordinated, various departments must submit the data as early as possible in a time bound and integrated manner.

A multi-pronged approach needs to be adopted to tackle the issue of "government litigation", depending on the kind of litigation.

A relook at the functioning of litigation-prone departments and formulating solutions unique to each department.

Robust internal dispute resolution mechanisms within each department as a means of addressing their grievances against the management.

The state must ensure that quasi-judicial authorities are judicially trained or create a separate class of judicial officers to discharge quasi-judicial functions.

Ministries and departments should conduct focused monitoring on pending cases particularly those pending for more than 10 years. To further bring down pendency of cases in courts, both the Centre and states should withdraw "frivolous and ineffective cases".

To discourage future litigations, the government should compulsorily introduce arbitration and mediation clauses in work contracts of its staff and public sector employees.

Learn from other countries like France who are following a model approach toward government litigation.

**Benefits**

LIMBS will help in organizing scattered Information at one single database.

LIMBS provide a low cost web technology access to all the stakeholders involved in a court case.

It is now possible to know the various stages of a case and monitor its progress on a continued basis.

LIMBS is meant to improve the Union government’s handling of cases.

Speedy resolution of disputes.

SMS prompts are sent to concerned officials for a timely action.

It reduces the quantum of cases that come to the courts.

It aims to reduce financial burden, save time and bring efficiency in the working of various Departments of a Ministry.

It will help to introduce transparency during the life cycle of a court case.

It will help authorities to take ‘data driven decision making’.

It will help in achieving ‘minimum government and maximum governance’ and Ease of Doing Business.

LIMBS bring the entire litigation process to an online platform, which is a paperless green initiative.

LIMBS has a huge database of court cases information which provides space for further research in to court cases analysis to bring in new innovations in to litigation matters.