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.
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.

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.

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.

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.

This was partly a consequence of the Supreme Court's 2014 decision to cancel all coal block allocations to private coal miners.

Introduction

Coal and Power Shortage in India

Reasons

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.

Coal is an integral and large part of our energy for the foreseeable future.

Way Forward
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.

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. 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.
In 2013, the court removed the statutory protection for convicted legislators from immediate disqualification.

In 2014, it directed completion of trials involving elected representatives within a year.

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.
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.

Necessary changes in the Constitution and Representation of the People Act must be carried out.

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 Assemblies.

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 currently 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 a 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.
Introduction

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

Concerns / Challenges

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.

In a recent case in the Supreme Court, the NHRC referred to itself 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

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.

Way Forward

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.

Problems with the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993

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.

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”.

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

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

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.


NHRC cannot penalise authorities which do not implement its orders.
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 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 furtherted 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. Subramaniam Aiyar, Amrita Bazar Patrika under Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Kesari and Maharatta under Balgadadhar 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, mobilise and consolidate nationalist public opinion.
The Government had enacted many strident laws to curb the newspapers, such as Vernacular Press Act and Section 124A of the IPC.

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.

Way Forward
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.

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

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

Introduction
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China 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 Rohingya 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.

India’s has missed another opportunity to China’s decisive and proactive diplomacy.

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.

China has plans to build an economic corridor with Myanmar.

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.

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.

While economic assistance is essential, the real problem is political, and there needs to be a political solution.

Myanmar should roll back the institutional barriers that render Rohingyas as second-class people.

Rohingyas must be accepted as equal citizens to have a long-term solution to the Rakhine unrest.

India’s interests in Myanmar

China’s interests in Myanmar

Way Forward

Flaws in the agreement / Challenges

Introduction

Concerns for India

China’s Three-stage Solution
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 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.

Strategic Importance of Quadrilateral

Indicating the need for setting up of the Quad

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 US 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.

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.

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.

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 US 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.

Concerns / Challenges

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

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Way Forward

Need for setting up of the Quad

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NCDs linked to lifestyles have surpassed communicable diseases as the leading cause of lost productivity and premature deaths.

Cities are expanding at the cost of walking, exercising, and cycling.

City governments are more sensitive to petrol and diesel prices, and road building than to pedestrian facilities and public transport.

Big differences in the status of social development between states.

Greater urbanisation will also pose a major challenge to Indian health systems in coming years.

Increasing life expectancy will lead to more disability and a larger disease burden.

Behavioural factors which include diets low in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, but high in salt and fat.

Unhealthy diets, high blood pressure, blood sugar and overweight, has doubled in India over the past two decades.

Health loss from road injuries highlighting the lack of a comprehensive national policy for injury prevention.

The health crisis can potentially impair India’s demographic dividend.

Rapid economic growth has changed Indians’ lifestyles. People eat out more often, and prefer Western-style junk food.

India needs to be awakened and the communities should be sensitised about the need for change.

Overweight and obesity can be prevented through a well-balanced lifestyle through healthy eating and exercise.

Soda and snack-makers such as PepsiCo and Nestle must make their products more nutritious.

India needs an effective, coordinated response that immediately reduces the level of air pollution at its sources.

In addition to treating disease, one also has to prevent the occurrence of new disease.

The state-specific data in the report must be used by policymakers to determine how to spend health budgets and which diseases to focus on.

A countrywide tax on calorie-dense foods, such as the ‘fat tax’ recently implemented by Kerala could be one possible approach.

Families must encourage outdoor activities, rather than allowing kids to stay indoors playing video games.

The report “India: Health of the Nation’s States” revealed that lifestyle diseases like heart and chronic respiratory diseases now kill more people than communicable diseases.

Malnutrition is still the single largest risk factor responsible for 15% of the total disease burden in India in 2016.

Child and maternal malnutrition in India was 12 times higher per person than in China in 2016.

The leading individual cause of death in India in 2016 was ischaemic heart disease.

In 2016, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) accounted for nearly 62% of all deaths, up from 37.9% in 1990.

A key culprit for NCDs is tobacco use, which accounted for 8% of India’s total disease burden in 2016.

Relatively wealthier states such as Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu recorded the largest proportions of deaths caused by NCDs compared to the poorer states.

Less developed states are still battling the old problems like infections, anaemia and neonatal disorders.

Diarrhoea, TB, road injuries and suicides are among top 10 causes of death.

Tobacco-related deaths are expected to double by 2030.

Research suggests the “average age of a person having their first heart attack is 50 years, at least ten years earlier than in developed countries.”

Smoking or chewing tobacco, excessive consumption of alcohol, and a preference for highly processed foods have direct, harmful impact on health.

United Nations estimated that NCDs like diabetes and cancer could cost the Indian economy a staggering $6.2 trillion between 2012 and 2030.

Half of all premature deaths caused by air pollution in the world occur in India.

Easy availability of calorie-dense foods is the biggest cause for the increase in lifestyle diseases.

According to research by the WHO an Indian today has over twice the odds of dying of NCDs than communicable disease.

Health experts are most worried about young people developing Type 2 diabetes.
Bots in Today's World

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.

Concerns / Challenges

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

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.

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.

Weather bots which inform about the weather conditions in the locality

Track personal finances and provide personal finance assistance

Benefits

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.

According to a survey, 93 per cent of Indian workers feel positive about meeting bots and virtual assistants at their workplace.

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

Growing usage of Bots

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

Way Forward

Bots must be conditioned to respond to each customer in a way that is personalised 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.
The special treatment to wines and spirits in TRIPS Agreement appears to be developed country-centric.

Developing countries, including India, seek the same higher level of protection for all GIs as was given under TRIPS for wines and spirits.

The battle for GI tag between states. The ongoing row between West Bengal and Odisha over the ownership of Rasogolla.

False use of geographical indications by unauthorized parties is detrimental to consumers and legitimate producers.

Cheap Power loom saris are sold as reputed Banarsi handloom saris, harming both the producers and misleads consumers.

Such unfair business practices result in loss of revenue for the genuine right-holders of the GI and also misleads consumers.

Protection of GI has, over the years, emerged as one of the most contentious IPR issues.

The benefits of GI tag is realised only when these products are effectively marketed and protected against illegal copying.

Effective marketing and protection requires quality assurance, brand creation, post-sale consumer feedback and support, prosecuting unauthorised copiers, etc.

For internationally recognised products like Darjeeling tea, international protection is of crucial importance.

Legal protection to GIs also extends to protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expression contained in the products.

Hence Intellectual Property is a power tool for economic development and wealth creation particularly in the developing world.

GIIs have the potential to be our growth engine. Policy-makers must pay a heed to this and give Indian GI products their true reward.

A geographical indication (GI) is a name or sign used on products which corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin.

It act as a certification that the product possesses certain qualities, is made according to traditional methods, or enjoys a certain reputation.

GI tag helps the producers to differentiate their products from competing products in the market.

It enables the producers to build a reputation and goodwill around their products, which often fetch a premium price.

The products help in export earning, promotion of tourism, cultural heritage and national identity.

For example Kanjeevaram silk sarees and Pochampally Ikkat contribute to exports and popularity.

GIIs have great potential to play a major role in trade between countries.

Legal protection to GIs protect livelihoods and encourage employment generation.

Owing to the premium prices that many GIs command today, there is a possibility of preserving many traditional skills.

Benefit to the rural economy by improving the incomes of farmers or nonfarmers.

GI allows genuine producers to capture the market and creates entry barriers for fakes.

Under Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, GIs are covered as an element of IPRs.

GI is governed by WTO’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

In India, GI tag is governed by Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection Act), 1999.

This Act is administered by Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, who is also Registrar of Geographical Indications.
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 shows 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 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.
Neither seeding nor the ABBA can stop quantity fraud. PDS dealer gives people a little less than their due — say 23 kg of foodgrain 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.
India remains vulnerable to cyber-espionage and cybercrime. With the growing adoption of the Internet and smartphones, 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.

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.

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.
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 long-term 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.
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 Gutteres 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 13.3 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 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.
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.
This has a devastating effect on our children’s development and health.

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

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.

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.

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 level.

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 high 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.
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 the 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.

Why social progress matters

Introduction

Economic Development and Social Progress

Social Progress Index (SPI)

Tracking Social Outcomes

Way Forward

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.
Ease of Doing Business: India jumps 30 Spots

Introduction
India has jumped 30 spots to number 100 in the latest Ease of Doing Business report for 2018 released by the World Bank.
This is a result of the government’s efforts over the past few years and its endeavour to strengthen its position as a preferred place to do business.

Criticisms
Major improvements in indicators such as resolving insolvency, paying taxes, protecting minority investors, getting electricity connection and getting credit.
India is among the top ten improvers this year.

Positives
India improved ranking in six of the ten indicators, while its performance in absolute terms improved in nine.
India’s corporate law and securities regulations were recognised as highly advanced.

Way Forward
The time taken to obtain an electricity connection in Delhi reduced from 138 days four years back to 45 days now, against a 78-day average in OECD high-income economies.

Where India slipped up
India witnessed the biggest jump in the criterion of paying taxes.
The World Bank report also appreciated India’s new insolvency law.
The World Bank also complimented India for easing tax compliance.

Impact
The need for local entrepreneurs to go through 12 procedures to start a business, as opposed to five in high-income countries.

Conclusion
Major slip in ranking in the category of registering property due to increase in time taken, cost and number of procedures for registration.

India still lags in starting a business, enforcing contracts and dealing with construction permits.

An improvement in the rankings will help not only foreign investments but also domestic investors.

It acknowledges the structural reforms the government has been undertaking.

Improvement in India’s rank will boost SMEs, job creation: World Bank.

There are examples across the world where an improved Doing Business ranking has resulted in increased employment and inclusive growth.

The report, which has often attracted criticism for not being representative enough, excluded the impact of demonetisation.

States must expedite construction permits.
Tackling the challenges will be key to sustain the momentum towards a higher ranking.

The government must work towards further improving the rankings and scale greater economic growth with the mantra of ‘reform, perform and transform’.
Need to work on areas including starting a business, trading across borders as well as land reforms.

Effective implementation of GST and bankruptcy law may improve India’s ranking significantly over the coming years.
Registering property would improve by digitising land records, improving titling and streamlining procedures on transfer of property.
Coordination across all departments and between the Centre, the States and local level to get the implementation right and fast.

We need to train staff in all departments so that they become champions of reforms and provide correct advice to applicants.
In enforcement of contracts the establishment of dedicated commercial courts in Delhi and Mumbai can reduce time taken for resolving commercial disputes.

Ensure that all approving authorities in the customs clearance process deliver seamless online approvals.
Bureaucracy must continue to be an active agent of process re-engineering and hard reforms must be pushed vigorously.

To secure changes in the remaining areas will require new laws, online systems and deepening the ongoing investment.

The Indian government needs to make continual efforts not only in doing business, but also on other areas like Skill India that will make India more competitive.

India's ambition must be to become the easiest and simplest place for investors to do business in.
**Electoral Bonds in India**

**Introduction**
- 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.

**Issues in Political Funding after changes made in 2016 and 2017**
- 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

**Way Forward**
- If the country is moving towards digitalization, 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 ill-effects of money power during elections.
- State funding of political parties as proposed by Indrajit Gupta Committee will ensure a level playing field for all the parties.
- Bringing political parties under the preview of RTI act.

**Transparency in Political Funding**
- 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, 69% 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.

**Electoral Bonds in India**

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

**Issues in Political Funding after changes made in 2016 and 2017**
- 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
Allowing each state to design its own crop insurance scheme and receiving the Central government share of the premium would yield desired results.

Rather than force E-NAM on states, incentivising each state to have their own electronic platform which meets the basic criteria of interoperability with other states

Central government should negotiate international trade treaties on agriculture (like RCEP) with the consent of state governments.

Centre must follow a scientific methodology for importing agricultural commodities so as to prevent fall in prices.

Our agriculture policy needs to focus on improving productivity

Access to formal credit, rationalizing crop rotation and inputs, and weathering seasonal risks.

Synergy between ministry of food processing with the ministry of agriculture and farmer welfare

Big data analytics will usher in improved governance and transparency.

Centre should set a floor price for all the farm produce. Centre should compensate the farmers for the shortfall between the market price and floor price through Price Deficiency Payment.

To prepare Indian farmers for global assimilation, funding for programmes like Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna and the sub-mission on agriculture mechanisation should be doubled

The current situation of rural transformation has brought to light women’s roles in agriculture.

With men migrating to cities for better jobs, women are now playing a critical role in farming

In the absence of men, women are making farming decisions.

National agricultural policies are not geared to cater to these women farmers.

Often, women are not given due recognition as farmers which hampers their ability to access productive input.

The potential downside to those women managing farms is the increased workload accompanied by no reduction in other duties.

This could reduce leisure time, which could, in turn, impact their sense of well-being.

Attitudes regarding women’s roles in agriculture must change

Thus, the onus is on policy makers to create a favourable ecosystem for women engaged in farming by ensuring greater access to physical and financial resources.

The farmers protesting across India are demanding implementation of Swaminathan Committee’s recommendations, lower input costs, farm loan waiver and fair price for farm produce among other things.

The “one-size-fits-all” policy created for the farm sector and programmes meant to double farmer incomes may not show better results.

No region specific norms in Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana force it to distribute benefits in uneven manner.

States interest in E-NAM is lacking and states like Haryana log in all FCI purchases as E-NAM transactions.

Whenever there is inflation, centre imports agricultural commodities which lead to fall in prices (Eg: Last year Pulses import). But when prices fall, the Central government remains apathetic.

No consultation of state governments in negotiating agriculture related trade treaties despite the fact that agriculture comes under state list.

To meet their priority-sector lending targets, banks have indiscriminately given loans of over Rs one lakh crore to farmers based on their asset value rather than economic viability.

Sometimes the loans given are more than the actual value of the crops sold each year by individual farmers.

Loans are also given against the pledge of gold and classified as agricultural loans.

No floor price for all agricultural commodities.

Extra burden on state governments for funding to certain central schemes.
There is an increase in women business owners and operators over the past several years. However, 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% of Indian business establishments are run by females. Most of the women-run businesses—79%—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 3C’s: 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 the US, there is a non-profit organization 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 the 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% of 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.
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 much 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 recognizing the value and dignity of all work (including unpaid work) and all workers

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.
The tax reductions will, however, result in a revenue loss of about Rs20,000 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.

GST Council slashes tax rates on 177 items from 28% 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 lends 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 Rs1.5 crore from Rs1 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.

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.
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.

What led to Moody's upgrading India's ratings

- 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
- Adoption of new FRBM Act, 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

Larger corporates will benefit, but not the smaller and mid-sized ones immediately.

Concerns / Challenges

- 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.

Moody's Upgrades India's Rating

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 cost.
- 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

Steps taken to strengthen banks

- Government addressing twin balance-sheet problem through the insolvency code and bank recapitalisation.
- Adoption of new FRBM Act, 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

Promising macros

- 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.
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 rediscover the health benefits. 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.
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 9% 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.

What is malnutrition?

Introduction

NITI Aayog launched National Nutrition Strategy aimed at Kuposhan Mukti 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.

Reduce all forms of malnutrition by 2030

National Nutrition Mission

Integration of nutrition-related interventions across sectors like women and child development, health, food and public distribution, sanitation, drinking water, and rural development.

National Nutrition Mission, similar to the National Health Mission.

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.

Promotion of breastfeeding for the first six months after birth

Universal access to infant and young child care

Enhanced care, referrals and management of severely undernourished and sick children

Bi-annual vitamin A supplements for children in the age group of 9 months to 5 years

Micro-nutrient supplements and bi-annual de-worming for children

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

Concerns / Challenges

Key features of the Strategy include:

Way Forward

Governance reforms

Healthcare and nutrition among children

Maternal care and nutrition

NITI Aayog launched National Nutrition Strategy
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.

Severe Acute 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.

RUTF may not benefit a common household in developing appropriate food habits for children.

The study found that therapeutic food was only "temporarily helpful in nutritional rehabilitation".

Malnutrition and India

SAM 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.

Concerns / Challenges

There is no largescale study of post-RUTF treated children in India so far.

Health activists say it cannot be a permanent solution.

Dependence on therapeutic food cannot be permanent. Children will stop consuming home cooked meals if anganwadi regularly give SAM kids RUTF.

Governments face immense challenges in building capacity and allotting sufficient resources to prevent and treat acute malnutrition.

The benefits of RUTF needs more intensive research.

Develop guidelines and a toolkit for early childhood development that would encourage frontline workers to counsel families on nutrition and feeding practices.

The management of SAM children must involve family-centric approach instead of food-centric approach.

Community to be educated on preventive measures against malnutrition including sustainable food culture, sanitation and gender disparity.

A more holistic solution involves counselling on breastfeeding and family planning to ensure low birth weight babies are not born.

Rural and tribal families consume mainly traditional food, and children must not be driven away from hot cooked meals.

Proper functioning of anganwadis so that at least regular meals are provided to children.

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.