The Right to Information Act (RTI) is an act of the Parliament of India which sets out the rules and procedures regarding citizens’ right to information. It was the Supreme Court that had sown the seeds of the RTI Act.

The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way by their public functionaries.

Their right to know, which is derived from the concept of freedom of speech.

The country saw many demands for an RTI Act; 12 states had enacted their own transparency laws before it was passed as a central legislation and implemented in 2005.

Before the RTI Act, the Supreme Court advocated ‘Voters’ right to know antecedents including criminal past of his candidate contesting election for MP or MLA is much more fundamental and basic for survival of democracy.

Centre amended the RTI Act for the first time since 2005.

The amendments passed by parliament empowered the central government to frame rules to decide the tenure, salaries and terms of service of all commissioners in the country.

Repeal of the J&K RTI Act following the reading down of Article 370.

Opening of the Chief Justice of India’s office to RTI.

The ideal of ‘Government by the people’ makes it necessary that people have access to information on matters of public concern.

The free flow of information about affairs of Government paves way for debate in public policy and fosters accountability in Government.

It creates a condition for ‘open governance’ which is a foundation of democracy.

Recently Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde called for a “filter” to check “abuse” of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Over the years, the Supreme Court has stressed the importance of transparency under RTI at times, and also remarked on its overuse at other times.

The need for strong RTI.

Jan Suchoha portal. It aims to provide information on government services and authorities to public suo moto in the true spirit of right to information.

The portal will prevent anomalies and corruption in government.

State governments must follow the Rajasthan government’s initiative of Jan Suchoha portal, which aims to make people, including the marginalised sections, a part of the governance process.

Centre and States must expedite filling up the vacancies in the State and Central Information Commissions.

Public authorities must be advised to provide greater voluntary dissemination on government portals, which should ease their load.

Way Forward.

Supreme Court’s Observations.

Jan Suchoha portal.

Concerns / Challenges.

A Transparency Audit report revealed that public authorities fared poorly with little transparency in parameters such as organisation and functions, budget and programme, e-governance, and other information disclosures.

Sometimes the kind of queries that were being asked were not always in public spirit and were posed by people who had no “locus standi” in the matter regarding the queries.

The other problem has been persisting vacancies in the State and Central Information Commissions.

According to estimates, nearly 60-70 lakh RTI applications are filed in India every year.

The nation does not want a scenario where 75% of the staff of public authorities spends 75% of their time in collecting and furnishing information to applicants instead of discharging their regular duties.

The Supreme Court had ordered disclosure of the requisite information.

Various public authorities have denied information on cases/inquiries going on against government officials.

Supreme Court had declared that NGOs are not beyond the RTI Act.

Whether an NGO or body is substantially financed by the government is a question of fact which has to be determined on the facts of each case.

The spotlight falls on several NGOs that have been getting public money and were not covered under the RTI.

Section 4 of the Act calls for pro-active and voluntary dissemination of information, but only a few Central and State institutions have published relevant information.

Supreme Court said that Public Information Officers have evaded the general public from getting the rightful information that they are entitled to.

Introduction.

Criticisms.

Genesis of the law.

Time Consumed in Replying.

Denial of Information.

Right to Information (RTI) is an act of the Parliament of India which sets out the rules and procedures regarding citizens’ right to information.
India lacks a robust yearly agricultural outlook, which refers to a tightly scanned, market intelligence-based forecast of availability and prices. Without it, there is little by way of advance warning.

The policymakers look up to the United States’ department of agriculture’s annual India projections for a reliable food supply outlook. Annual surge in prices suggests that a lot of work to fix the food distribution network remains incomplete.

Repeated stocking limits on onion traders discourages private investments in modern cold storages. With crumbling infrastructure, many APMC mandis are running over their capacity.

The government needs to find a sustainable solution for price stabilisation, rather than taking temporary ad hoc measures. Multi-pronged strategy involving technology, extension, public stocks, and market intelligence is needed to address excessive volatility.

Investment in cold chains and adequate food-processing facilities can help tide over crises with dehydrated onions.

Price stabilisation requires a fine-tuned policy whereby the government efficiently buys excess stocks during winter harvest and releases them during summer shortages. The government should efficiently and effectively intervene in private markets to curb price volatility. If the government feels that traders are colluding to rig the market, then the Competition Commission of India should look into it.

Indian farmers face several risks—production, weather, quality, market, and so on. While crop production is often seasonal and regional, consumption is round the year and across the country. So market prices of agriculture commodities tend to be volatile.

Retail inflation for the month of October breached the Reserve Bank of India’s medium-term comfort target of 4 per cent. The reason behind mounting retail inflation is the spike in food prices led by uptick in vegetable prices.

Onion prices are emblematic of India’s larger food inflation battle. Vegetables generally become expensive during the June-September period. Rainy spells hamper freight movement across the country, dwindling supplies.

Droughts, on the other hand, can reduce output. Malpractices add to the problem.

This year’s onion supply crunch is due to sluggish start to the monsoon, and, then, delayed harvests due to untimely rains. Flooding has ruined about a third of the crop in Maharashtra, India’s largest onion-growing state.

Karnataka received heavy rainfall during the harvest period of the onion grown in kharif season. The next harvest will hit markets only from January. Till then, prices will remain under pressure.

Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) refers to any fund constituted for the purpose of containing extreme volatility in prices of selected commodities. It helps regulate the price volatility of important agri-horticultural commodities like onion, potatoes and pulses.

The scheme provides for maintaining a strategic buffer of aforementioned commodities for subsequent calibrated release to moderate price volatility and discourage hoarding and unscrupulous speculation.

Apart from domestic procurement from farmers/wholesale mandis, import may also be undertaken with support from the Fund.
Big data generated from geo-informatics and remote sensing platforms can contribute to early warning systems for disasters.

Geographical Information Systems (GIS), Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and environmental monitoring sensors have a potential to predict disasters such as earthquakes.

Geo-informatics information along with transportation network data can benefit to understand human mobility patterns during disasters.

Social media can provide near to real-time information of the occurrence of disasters.

Using geospatial datasets can further provide location based services to avoid hazardous situations.

It will also benefit in the identification of regions which need the most urgent attention.

The storage and processing of large volumes of disaster data are perhaps the biggest challenge.

Challenge is to understand how to link different datasets with different kinds of disasters.

The potential of big data technology has not been fully explored for disaster management.

Not all big data is public and freely available.

Challenges related to protection of personal information and privacy.

It’s important to protect individuals’ identifications and efforts should be put to anonymize the collected datasets.

After data is aggregated and anonymized, an appropriate big data technology should be used for processing and storing the data.

Integration of datasets along with the providing the access to information through a web-based system to agencies managing disasters is most crucial to enable effective decision making.

Leverage techniques from artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to understand and explore correlations and draw findings from the disaster-related data.

Analysis from processed disaster information can help to identify the most effective strategies to respond future disasters.

Effective management as well as monitoring of disasters is a global challenge.

Regardless of numerous efforts by government agencies, disasters continue to occur.

The vast variety of data sources present in times of a disaster creates a need for integration and aggregation of data.

Big data is defined as the technological paradigm that allows researchers to conduct an efficient analysis of vast quantities of data.

It is the collection of scientific and engineering methods and tools that help in making the best of massive amounts of available data.

Disaster management is defined as ‘the integration of all activities required to build, sustain and improve the capabilities to prepare for, respond to, recover from, or mitigate against a disaster’.

The ultimate success of response and recovery activities are influenced by the data collected during the preparedness and prevention phases.

Processing real-time disaster data as quick as possible in order to react and coordinate efficiently.

Effective planning and management hugely depends on the quality as well as quantity of the data available.

Big data tools and techniques can assist disaster management officials to optimize decision-making procedures.

Big data help policy-makers and first responders to come with quick and concrete decisions on the number of people affected, type and nature of the damage and where to allocate the resources.

Early warning system for tsunami, storm, forest fire, and flood can be more accurate and reliable from these huge volumes of data.
Green Deal that has been announced by the European Commission, with binding targets for member nations to cut emissions by at least 60% by 2030 and go net zero by 2050. This approach could potentially make the EU the leader in global climate action.

The real losses from extreme weather events that climate-vulnerable countries, India included, are facing with frightening regularity.

Even insured losses worldwide during 2017 and 2018 together stood at a record $225 billion.

We have seen floods in Mozambique and Malawi, droughts in Senegal and the Gambia, and flooding in Bangladesh and Nepal. Scientists say it is only going to get worse.

India played a strong role in critiquing the developed world's continuing poor record on climate action.

It argued that unless a stocktaking exercise of the fulfillment of various pre-2020 commitments by developed countries showed that they were making significant progress, India would not raise its climate ambition for its next round of Paris Agreement targets due in 2020.

It is entirely appropriate for countries such as India to insist on not taking share of the global mitigation burden unless developed countries deliver on the minimal parameter of fulfilling their existing promises.

India also took a lead in calling for more finance for developing countries for climate action.

It is crucial that India continue to push developed countries in this fashion as the entire global climate action framework has been put in jeopardy by the inaction of big polluters.

India's own status as a low per capita carbon emitter offers little comfort as its overall emissions are bound to grow.

With a low base compared to other major nations, it may well achieve its initial voluntary targets under the Paris Agreement. A shift away from fossil fuels is needed in the longer term.

India has to involve its States in mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Death and destruction by frequent storms, floods and droughts should lead to urgent cohesive action.

The challenge now in India is to design an equity-driven 1.5°C-compatible NDC which ties performance to finance effectively, while protecting the interests of our most vulnerable.

At COP 25 in Madrid, countries failed in galvanising action to address climate change. The countries party to the Paris Agreement failed to agree on rules and procedures to govern a global carbon market, on finance for losses caused by extreme weather events.

Unproductive wrangle over establishing a market system to trade in carbon credits earned through reductions in emissions.

The divergence between the developed and developing countries, as the developed world - led by the US - blocked any attempt at a compromise using a 'take it or leave it approach'.

They refused to recognize the importance of finance for loss and damage, the raising of finance for adaptation, the significance of meeting pre-2020 goals.

Developed countries also refused to relent on the question losses suffered by developing countries due to climate impact.

The developed world didn't honour Common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR).

Developed countries also blocked any commitments to meet its emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol.

The developing countries, led by India argued that not honouring pre-2020 commitments would mean that the burden of meeting the emission gaps would fall on developing countries.

The framing of rules and procedures for carbon markets has been pushed to next year's COP summit.

Some countries seem to be working to limit their obligations under the convention and the Paris Agreement.

For raising $100 billion a year from 2020 for developing countries.

For creating a strong framework to address loss and damage from climate events.

For transferring technology to poorer countries on reasonable terms.

For rising pressure from civil society in several countries for concrete action.

Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning of near-catastrophic consequences of inaction.

Analysis from the UN Environment Programme on the gap between current greenhouse gas emissions and the limit over the coming decade.
The Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (G-AgS) will be a key player in propagating policies and action plans for CSA adoption.

In the climate-smart agriculture (CSA) sector too, it is critical to have strong partnerships and knowledge sharing.

Zero-budget farming (ZBF) helps farmers in developing countries reduce their reliance on greenhouses and associated greenhouse gases.

How is climate-smart agriculture implemented?

It includes practices like farm pond, bunding, trenching, mulching, and other practices for conservation of soil moisture. CSA would promote innovations in adapting farming communities to climate change.

How to reduce greenhouse emissions in agriculture?

CSA is an approach for developing agricultural strategies to secure sustainable food security under climate change. It is in line with FAO’s vision for Sustainable Food and Agriculture and supports FAO’s global goal to make agriculture more productive and resilience to climate change.

Climate change is expected to hit developing countries the hardest.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions starts with managing agricultural systems to address climate change.

Climate events, irregular rainfall behaviour, and unexpected meteorological events directly impact ecosystems, water availability, and biodiversity.

With India’s climate expected to become warmer within a few years, the need to increase agricultural output and reduce food waste becomes even more critical.

This will result in more losses, damage, and costs for farmers, especially smallholder farmers who have limited access to markets and must rely on smaller plots of land.

The G-AgS is an initiative to help the people who manage agricultural systems respond effectively to climate change.

Food supply needs to grow by 60 percent by 2050 in order to satisfy the demand for food.

In order to meet the predicted demand for food, we would require higher yields. Given that it may not be possible to increase substantially, higher temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, rising sea levels, and more frequent extreme weather events pose risks for agriculture.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, ‘End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture’ is a key element in the initiative.

Higher temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, rising sea levels, and more frequent extreme weather events pose risks for agriculture.

Sustainable increasing productivity and incomes are crucial in addressing these challenges. Adapting to climate change requires bold action and innovative solutions.
**Environmental Challenges from Societal and Technological Perspectives**

**Introduction**

Mankind’s progress has had unintended consequences on the environment. These include climate change, extreme weather events and the reduced availability of potable water. Predictions made back in the 1980s about climate change are starting to come true.

**Human Progress and its Impact on Environment**

Unintended consequences of human progress over the past decades have begun to adversely impact the environment. The layer of ozone is being depleted due to our excessive use of aerosol chemicals. Extreme weather events around the world appear to be more common than before.

**Problems with Access to Potable Water.**

Cities like Chennai and Mumbai get flooded during the monsoon, and yet run out of water later in the year.

In rural areas drinking water is fast becoming inaccessible because of pollution and environmental changes.

This situation is becoming common in cities like Chennai, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

Children and women often face the burden of fetching water, resulting in increased school drop-out rates, particularly for girls.

We must think about diversification of livelihoods at a community level, building resilience, and policies for environmental migrants.

We must redefine the needs of an individual, and understand the reasons behind increasingly consumeristic lifestyles across the globe.

It is evident that our challenges related to the environment are interwoven with challenges from societal, technological and philosophical perspectives.

We must confront these challenges holistically, and evolve sustainable pathways through individual, societal and state actions.

**Way Forward**

Technology is one of the key attributes of today’s human society.

On one hand, our tech-centred orientation is one of the primary causes of our alienation from nature.

On the other, technology can help us cope with the environmental stresses being faced by human society.

Technology is one of the major factors inducing environmental pollution.

To accommodate technological progress, humans have always sacrificed the environment.

This has led to complex issues like climate change and wide-scale biodiversity loss.

Environmental migration is one of the key issues that future generations will need to cope with.

Complexity of how humanity should respond to environmental migrants.

The United Nations forecasts that there could be up to 1 billion environmental migrants by 2050, mostly from coastal areas.

Thus, Environmental disturbance is the unintended consequences of human progress.
The Report challenges the idea that economic growth will automatically lead to development and wellbeing, explaining how systemic inequalities are deeply damaging society.

As the number of people coming out of poverty is increasing, the world is veering towards another type of poverty.

The old inequalities were based on access to health services and education whereas the next generation of poverty is based on technology, education and climate change.

India has both types of poverty.

This will make India’s effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals tough.

Early childhood and lifelong investment, investing in young children’s learning, health and nutrition.

Public spending and fair taxation.

Advancing gender equality, including through policies that address underlying biases and social norms.

Social protection policies that would ensure fair compensation for “crowdwork”.

International consensus on how to tax digital activities.

Recycling revenues from carbon pricing to benefit taxpayers.

Human Development Report (HDR) is an annual report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development — life expectancy, education and per capita income.

South Asia was the fastest growing region in human development progress witnessing a 46% growth over 1990-2018.

The report notes that no place in the world has gender equality.

The world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 as per the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

It forecasts that it may take 202 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity.

The report presents a new index on social norms, indicating how prejudices and social beliefs obstruct gender equality.

This indicates a backlash to women’s empowerment.

New forms of inequalities will manifest in future through climate change.

India ranks 129 out of 189 countries on the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI) — up one slot from the 130th position last year.

Between 1990 and 2018, India’s HDI value increased by 50 per cent.

For inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI), India’s position drops by one position to 130, losing nearly half the progress (.647 to .477) made in the past 30 years.

The IHDI indicates percentage loss in HDI due to inequalities.

Despite lifting 271 million people out of poverty between 2005-15, India still remains home to 28 per cent of the world’s poor.

Group-based inequalities persist on the Indian Subcontinent, especially affecting women and girls.

Government schemes on financial inclusion and universal health care would help India in achieving SDGs.
If more women did paid work, India’s national income would rise dramatically.

One estimate is that GDP would go up by 20% if women matched men in workplace participation.

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

Providing greater impetus to women entrepreneurs would be critical for India’s growth.

Women entrepreneurs help drive innovation and job creation, besides assisting in addressing the world’s most critical challenges.

In 2018, Iceland became the first country in the world to mandate companies to prove that they do not have a gender and ethnicity-based pay gap.

One of the biggest challenges to achieving equal pay is getting more women into jobs in emerging digital industries.

Though gender parity is an official policy in various corporate and other settings, the outcomes remain extremely poor in comparison with other countries.

Economic Survey 2018 stressed on the need to increase women participation in labour force. It said that lower women engagement adversely affects the growth potential of the economy.

The pay gap increases with age, work experience, and rise in occupational hierarchy – thus disincentivising the women to stay on.

Women need the 3C’s: Confidence, Capabilities, access to Capital. Men need to understand that women are their equals.

One of the best ways to close the gender gap is to focus on the skills of tomorrow.

This means ensuring women have access to the most in-demand skills.

Companies must adopt diverse hiring practices and more inclusive workplace cultures.

Companies need to take bold steps to make sure their hiring processes are fair and inclusive and provide women with the training and sponsorship that they need to advance.

Countries could add trillions of dollars to their economies by increasing women’s participation in workforces and ensuring they earn as much as men.

Social stigma against women in the workforce and the general environment of social injustice against women must be tackled.

Unless India undergoes a social revolution that puts the idea of equity at its forefront, gender gaps would get harder to close.

India has made significant economic progress in recent decades.

Such economic growth has not been matched by progress towards women’s equal economic participation.

India has a gender wage gap, despite the existence of India’s Equal Remuneration Act 1976 which mandates equal pay for equal work.

The gender pay gap is a measure of the gap in the overall earnings of men and women.

Overall gender equality is improving but the number of women entering work is “stalling” and financial disparities are widening, found the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) annual index.

India is the only country in the WEF list to exhibit a wider economic gap than its political one.

India’s rank, at 112th out of 153 countries, in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.

IT services showed a sharp pay gap in favour of men.

Across the unorganized sector and especially in areas like agriculture, women are routinely paid significantly less than men, citing differences in capability.

The growth in formal sector jobs has not kept pace with the supply of educated women, which may have led to “crowding out of females” from the workforce.

Women constitute a very high proportion among the low skilled informal worker category, and are engaged in low-productivity and low paying work.

In India, the reasons for gender pay gap ranges from the socio-economic to the structural.

Girl children are sometimes kept out of schools or made to drop out of school early.

Even if they are educated, many women are not allowed to work by their families.

Women who do join the workforce often need to take extended leaves for maternity and child care, and even the healthcare of other family members.

Women may struggle to close the gender pay gap as technology reshapes the global economy.

Women’s jobs more likely to be replaced by robots while men dominate emerging sectors, according to a leading global think-tank.

As technology creates new jobs AI, engineering and cloud computing, women risk losing out as they are less likely to have “disruptive” skills for careers with high job growth and salaries.

The changes also present an opportunity for women if they train in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) roles.
India attaches great importance to strengthening cooperative security. India’s initiatives over the last five years to build regional cooperation and security are anchored in its ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy. Eg: India’s initiative to launch a South Asia Satellite to improve communication and disaster response.

India has always been the first off the block to provide relief in the wake of tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

India is keen to strengthen other regional groupings and partnerships such as the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) and BIMSTEC.

India is also committed to greater connectivity and cooperation with the ASEAN region through its ‘Act East’ policy.

India has also expanded its cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) in the extended neighbourhood.

These underlying principles have translated into India building excellent ties in its neighbourhood.

The shared maritime interests in the extended neighbourhood remain anchored in developing a blue economy.

The greatest challenge before South Asia is the fight against illiteracy and poverty, climate change and natural disasters, and food and energy security issues.

Efforts of the SAARC to build a regional consensus on connectivity have been undermined by one state’s obstructionist policies.

The SAARC motor vehicle agreement is vetoed by one country.

India and Afghanistan have been denied overland transit by a common neighbour.

The intra-South Asian trade remains one of the lowest in the world.

South Asia can truly prosper only when it is free from the scourge of terrorism.

Cooperation to overcome challenge before South Asia will ensure the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the measures to improve regional security is to strengthen connectivity linkages.

A better connectivity can help nations overcome their political differences by conceiving their borders as bridges and not as barriers.

Afghanistan, devastated by conflict, requires the support of its neighbours to spur economic growth.

Over the last few years, the concept of security has widened exponentially to include both traditional and non-traditional security threats.

It includes economic and military competition, weapons of mass destruction, climate change, piracy, radical ideology, cyber-attacks, drug and human trafficking, and energy and food security.

Terrorism, especially cross-border terrorism, continues to challenge peace and prosperity.

Cooperative security implies that countries seek, a degree of convergence with regard to threat perceptions, and opportunities with a conviction that it is advantageous to their security, stability and prosperity.

The Cold War and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) implied cooperative security based on ideology.

New constructs are emerging in the wake of the dramatic geo-strategic changes in recent times.

Germany has called for an integrated European Union (EU) military that would complement NATO.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and EU are glued together by geography, history and shifting regional security paradigms.

Developmental finance has the potential to create economic dependence.

South Asia has a common history and celebrates its great cultural and linguistic overlap.

Cooperative security in any region is like a chain which is as strong as its weakest link.

The weakest link in the chain continues to be Pakistan, which uses terrorism as an instrument of state policy against its neighbours.

The consequences of such a policy pursued in one country in South Asia has been felt in other South Asian countries as well – from Afghanistan to India and from Bangladesh to Sri Lanka.
Introduction

Chinese imports have thrown a spanner in the wheel of India's economic progress per se, and the industrial sector in particular.

Impact of Chinese Imports

Massive Chinese imports have undermined capacity utilisation, technological advancement and dented capex.

Over the last 10-15 years, massive inflow of cheap Chinese imports have made our manufacturing uncompetitive.

Chinese imports are undermining 'Make in India'

Chinese imports have led to the closure of many businesses, switching from manufacturing to trading and over-dependence on Chinese inputs.

The experience of India's FTAs with Asian countries has shown that the Indian industry has not experienced the anticipated gains.

There is the widespread view that India did not gain from its FTAs as it did not undertake the reforms needed to improve competitiveness.

By that implication, joining the RCEP would pose a problem.

But it would then compel India to undertake requisite reforms and become competitive.

Globally, there is stagnant demand in the West, excess, competitive manufacturing capacity in China and a huge growing demand in India.

The logic of free trade is for India's growing demand to be met by China's excess capacity, without need for creation of new capacity.

Joining the RCEP would only accelerate the process.

There is an urgent need to address the issue of Chinese imports.

Smarter, creative policies for developing and nurturing the nation's industrial and technological capacities need to be crafted.

Economic nationalism and greater ambition is the need of the hour.

Manufacturing strategy needs to be synchronised with phasing out of imports from China.

Dismantling of the shady importing nexus.

Random and surprise check of imports at ports in terms of invoice prices.

Fixing of minimum import prices wherever possible.

Blacklisting and taking punitive actions against importers/exporters/clearing agents/customs involve in dubious imports etc.

Scrutiny of GST and e-way bills relating to imported items can help in detecting malfeasance.

However, we have to take well-calibrated measures without creating sudden and large disruptions as many industries are dependent on import of raw material and components from China.

China's Success

Western economic commentary throughout the 1990s tended to be critical of China which was not acting according to the prevailing economic paradigm.

China became a member of the WTO only in 2000, and that too with difficulty.

But being outside the WTO did not slow China's phenomenal rise.

Having conquered global markets, China is now the proponent of free trade and globalisation.

In 1991 — the year of Indian economic reforms and opening up of the country to globalisation — the per capita incomes of India and China were the same.

Technological capacities were at similar levels.

Today China's GDP and per capita incomes are five times that of India.

The trade deficit with China was 40 per cent of the total deficit in FY 2018.

Chinese imports in dollar terms multiplied by 68 times over 1998-2018 period.

Growing imports of consumer goods, thermal power plants — and now solar panels and exports of primary products like iron ore and cotton — constitute India's trade with China.

All that is imported was being made, and can be made in India.
India’s approach towards Indo-pacific has been an inclusive one with Open, integrated and balanced approach. India’s policy perspective on Indo-Pacific, which includes “inclusiveness”, “openness”, “ASEAN centrality” and that the concept was not directed against any country. The focus of the Indo Pacific initiative is on connectivity, enhancing maritime security, counterterrorism, non-proliferation and cyber issues. The government has introduced the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and one that is founded upon a cooperative and collaborative rules-based order. India is also trying to make innovative use of trade and diplomacy as its strategic arsenals.

The situation in the South China Sea is more complex. Various claimants are pitted against one another, with China’s nine-dash line engulfing the Exclusive Economic Zone of several others. China has yet to produce a clear line with exact co-ordinates on a large-scale map in support of its claims. The scramble in the South China Sea is more about fishing rights, natural resources and the domination of trade and energy sea lines of communication.

There are many contradictions in the context of the emerging construct of the Indo-Pacific. India, Japan, Australia and many others, advocates freedom of navigation and over-flight, and respect for the rule of law and international norms. It adheres to many tenets of UNCLOS without having ratified the treaty. India at this juncture does not have to make a binary choice in the Indo-Pacific between a development-centric agenda with ASEAN centrality and a security-centric outlook revolving around the Quad. Ties with Japan would remain a key component of India’s vision for a stable Indo-Pacific and a cornerstone of its Act East policy.

China’s adherence to UNCLOS is more honoured in breach than in observance. China justifies its increasing forays in the IOR, including with nuclear submarines, by claiming that it has “always” had a historical right to the Indian Ocean. Both are likely to remain parallel tracks with some overlap for the foreseeable future. Build-up of India’s naval capabilities, if India has to emerge as one of the main players in the Indo-Pacific.

India will have to manage its relations with China, no matter the challenges. Freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law will make our sea lanes the pathway to prosperity. Concerns / Challenges

Why Indo-Pacific region?

Way Forward

Indo-Pacific Framework

Indo-Pacific is a “natural region” ranging “from the shores of Africa to that of the America.” A “stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific Region” is an “important pillar” of India’s strategic partnership with the United States. Increasing use of the term Indo-Pacific recognises India’s centrality to global influences.

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

Increasing use of term Indo-Pacific as a single strategic space is an outgrowth of China’s growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

“Indo-Pacific” is today a buzzword that has been interpreted differently by various countries in their outlook or vision documents.

Introduction

Maintaining regional stability.

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

For the long-term vision of national interest.

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

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

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

For free sea and air lanes, connectivity and upholding international rules and norms.
Russia could serve as a security provider in the region with regard to anti-piracy, anti-terrorism and anti-trafficking. It can assist regional states in developing their own capacities in these areas. Russian navy could also contribute to disaster-relief operations in the Indian Ocean. Russian activism in the Indian Ocean should be a welcome addition to the emerging multipolarity in the region.

Until now, Delhi's discourse on the Indian Ocean has been focused on the growing competition with China. This has led to the rapid expansion of India's naval cooperation with the United States and Japan. As well as with its regional partners like Indonesia, Singapore and other ASEAN countries in the east, many nations in the Gulf as well as the east coast of Africa. India has been developing a partnership with France, a traditional security provider in the Western Indian Ocean. India would also want to develop similar intensive engagement with Britain and the European Union.

Moscow's deepening tensions with the West and growing strategic embrace of Beijing do pose problems for India's own strategy. Implications of the emerging Sino-Russian naval and maritime partnership. Delhi needs to engage with Moscow on the unfolding Sino-Russian naval partnership. Delhi needs an early and intensive dialogue with Moscow on its Indian Ocean collaboration with China.

Russia is located far from the Indian Ocean, but the region has always played an important role in the country's strategy. During the Soviet times, Moscow maintained steady presence in the Indian Ocean, including naval presence. After the collapse of the Soviet union, its attention to the region decreased. In the latest decade Moscow is coming back to the Indian Ocean.

Over the last few years, China and Russia have conducted naval manoeuvres in the Western Pacific, the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean. Recently, Russian and China conducted a trilateral naval exercise with South Africa in the strategic waters off the Cape of Good Hope. This is the first time that the three countries conducted a joint exercise. The exercise reflects the growing weight of China and Russia in South Africa's security calculus. Iran has said that it plans to hold joint naval drills with Russia and China in the turbulent waters of the Persian Gulf. Recently, Perekop, a training vessel of the Russian Navy, arrived at the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.

Russia’s return to the Indian Ocean must be seen as a part of its new strategic activism in the Middle East and Africa. Russia is a vast continental state and its limited access to the sea remains vulnerable to exploitation by its adversaries. Russia has the capacity to shape the strategic outcomes in the region. Any conflict in the Indian Ocean will have long-lasting repercussions and would eventually affect Russia. Moscow is one of the world’s major arms exporters and has turned that into an effective leverage in the Indian Ocean region. Russia has stepped up its naval diplomacy in the region, making regular visits to ports in the region and deepening special relationships that it already has with countries like India.
Government of India is implementing various programs/schemes and legislations to address various forms of gender discrimination.

NCERT has developed syllabus and textbooks across the subjects to promote gender sensitization in the school curriculum.

- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017
- 73rd - 74th Amendment of the Constitution mandating 33% reservation for women in the local governance.

Legislations to prevent exploitation/harassment of women:
- Beti Bacho Beti Padhao (BBBP) to improve the Child Sex Ratio and enabling education for the girl children.
- Swadhar Greh Scheme to provide relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress.
- Ujawala a Comprehensive Scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue.
- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) to provide loan to poor women to promote their socio-economic development.
- ‘One Stop Centre’ to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence.
- ‘Mahila Police Volunteers’ in which MPVs act as a link between police and community.

Society plays a key role in creating a safer environment for women.

Raising gender-sensitive children will lead to creating a safer society.

After the Nirbhaya incident, the UN Human Rights chief had called rape and violence against women in India a “national problem” which would need “national solutions”.

Better policing, fast-track courts, quick sentencing are the need of the hour as each can serve as a deterrent.

What should be included in every curriculum is gender sensitisation, right from school.

Public places must be made safer for all.

Boys and girls should be raised right in an atmosphere of freedom and a culture of mutual respect.

Self-esteem, right to privacy and gender sensitivity are issues that have to be integrated within the psyche of the children as they grow.

Changes in school and college syllabi to educate young people on the social values of equality and respect for women’s autonomy is needed.

Promote egalitarian gender norms as part of life skills and comprehensive sexuality education curricula taught to young people.

Gender inequality is a long-term problem in our society and female are discriminated in many ways in the social context of India, although legally women have equal right.

Thus, there is a great need to sensitize the society on gender issues so that there would be no discrimination on the basis of gender.

Women empowerment through gender sensitisation is one of the key criteria to unlock the potential of women.

Women are discriminated not only in the womb and childhood, but also in every walk of life.

The challenges and limitations women face in their day to day life restrain them to comprehend their potential for personal growth and freedom to live a better and respectable life.

Ensuring gender equality is one of the first steps towards an inclusive and safer society.

Gender sensitization would help in removing many perceptions we have about being a male or female.

Gender sensitisation and wider societal changes are needed to end sex crimes.

The root cause of gender discrimination is the patriarchal mind set prevalent in the Indian society.

Though this mind set is changing with urbanization and education, still there is long way to go for a permanent change in the scenario.

The 2017 National Crime Records Bureau data said a total of 3.55 lakh cases of crimes against women were reported, a 8% rise compared to 2016.

For every rape reported, there are many which go unreported as patriarchal mindsets remain unchanged.

The criminal laws and judicial system permits under-age convicts to get away with lenient punishment.

Centuries of social conditioning and rigid gender constructs have lead to an unequal balance of power between men and women, which results in discrimination and violence against the latter.

Men are more likely to perpetrate violence if they have low education, a history of child maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence against their mothers and harmful use of alcohol.
India’s growth this century has been fuelled by telecommunications. The connectivity revolution has powered India’s information technology and helped hundreds of millions of young Indians improve their prospects. If India is to become the sort of entrepreneurial superstar, then the telecom sector is going to be central to that plan.

India is currently the world’s second-largest telecommunications market and has registered strong growth in the past decade and half. The liberal and reformist policies of the Government of India have been instrumental along with strong consumer demand in the rapid growth in the Indian telecom sector. The deregulation of FDI norms has made the sector one of the fastest growing and a top five employment opportunity generator in the country.

Telecom sector is under immense financial stress, as admitted by all stakeholders. The troubles of today are rooted in the fast-paced growth of yesterday. The industry is burdened with debt of ₹7 lakh crore.

India is faced with the prospect of a telecom monopoly or duopoly. In addition to corporate taxes, the government’s telecom revenue includes GST spectrum auction, revenue share as licence fees, amounting to about 30% of customer bill.

Indian telecom operators, which offer the cheapest mobile data services in the world, pay more for airwaves than any of their global counterparts. In the quarter ending June 2019 Bharti Airtel reported a loss for the first time ever.

Long-running dispute between the sector and the state on how to calculate the government’s share of revenue.

The Supreme Court has now ordered the companies to pay the government not just the dues but a hefty penalty -- as well interest on both.

**Distress signals**

Telecom operators in India are battling shrinking revenue streams, thanks to cut-throat tariffs, and high debt due to expensive airwaves bought in previous auctions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry adjusted gross revenue (in ₹ tn)</th>
<th>Industry average revenue per user (in ₹)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY13</td>
<td>FY14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Levies on telecom operators in other countries**

- India: 20.5-22% plus cost recovery of spectrum usage charges plus SIM tax.
- Sri Lanka: 25.55% plus international direct dialling levy.
- Bangladesh: 25.95% plus 50 million Bangladeshi taka per licence plus SIM tax.
- China: 11%.
- Malaysia: 12.5%.

**Debt in Indian telecom sector (in ₹ tn)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY13</th>
<th>FY14</th>
<th>FY15</th>
<th>FY16</th>
<th>FY17</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cellular Operators Association of India.
Success is being achieved where policies and programmes focus on people, not diseases, and where communities are fully engaged from the outset in designing, shaping and implementing health policies.

By signing the 2016 UN Political Declaration on Ending AIDS, countries affirmed the critical role that communities play in advocacy, coordination of AIDS responses and service delivery.

Communities have been the most trusted and reliable partners for the National AIDS Control Organization and the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS.

They are fully engaged in many aspects of the National AIDS Response, including prevention, care, support and treatment programmes.

Our communities present us with a lot of untapped potential.

Unleashing this is the key to gaining the momentum we need to make faster progress towards reaching UNAIDS Fast-Track targets.

The more we invest in communities, the closer we get to ending the AIDS epidemic.

The theme of the World AIDS day this year ("Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community"), which is communities make the difference, is a timely reminder that community wide coalitions are needed.

The Indian experience has been more positive but still calls for continued vigilance and committed action.

The strength of India’s well established National AIDS Control Programme, with a cogent combination of prevention and case management strategies, must be preserved.

The road map must include higher budgetary allocation to public health care and increasing AIDS awareness.

There is a need for greater access, analysis and applied use of data within the national HIV response.

Success in our efforts to reach the 2030 target calls for resurrecting the combination of political will, professional skill and wide ranging pan-society partnerships.

Towards AIDS Free India

The UN Sustainable Development Goals include ensuring good health and well-being for all by 2030.

This includes the commitment to end the AIDS epidemic.

India has the third largest HIV epidemic in the world.

HIV-related deaths declined by 71% between 2005 and 2017.

India has an estimated 2.14 million people living with HIV.

Drug treatment of HIV is now well founded with an array of established and new anti-viral drugs.

Throughout India, numerous non-governmental and community-based organisations have joined hands to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS at the local State and national levels.

Over the past decade, India has made significant progress in tackling its HIV epidemic, especially in comparison with other countries in the region.

National AIDS Control Programme has been particularly effective at targeting high-risk groups.

India has announced a contribution of 22 million US Dollars to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFTAM).

Much success has been achieved in the past 20 years in the global battle against AIDS.

HIV-related deaths fell due to Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART).

Generic versions of the drugs were generously made available by Indian generic manufacturers.

Ignorance and stigma were vigorously combated by coalitions of HIV-affected persons supported by enlightened sections of civil society and the media.

Risk factors for cardiovascular disease are high among survivors as they age.

Other infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis can co-exist.

Mental health disorders are a challenge in persons who are on lifelong therapy.

Given the wide diversity of the HIV virus strains, development of a vaccine has been highly challenging.

The stigma and discrimination hinders access to effective HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care services amongst high-risk populations.

Despite free antiretroviral treatment being available, uptake remains low as many people face difficulty in accessing clinics.