The Supreme Court held that the office of the Chief Justice of India is a public authority and falls within the ambit of the Right to Information Act.

It agreed in principle to share information but on a case-to-case basis and subject to RTI safeguards.

The RTI Act is a strong weapon that enhances accountability, citizen activism and, consequently, participative democracy.

The Supreme Court upheld the 2010 Delhi high court verdict.

The Delhi High Court in 2010, ruled that the CJI’s office was under the ambit of the RTI.

Independence of the judiciary was not a privilege but a responsibility cast upon the office, the High Court had ruled.

The verdict underlines the balance Supreme Court needs between transparency and protecting its independence.

The step is significant because it opens the doors to RTI requests that will test the frontiers of what has been a rather opaque system.

Supreme court has reiterated the established position that “no one is above the law”.

The verdict has opened so many doors and even lawmakers (members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies) and others ought to be under the RTI Act.

Independence and accountability go hand in hand and that independence of the judiciary can't be ensured only by denying information.

There should be a balance between RTI and privacy, and that information-seeking should be calibrated.

The principal consideration is of public interest and that judges are not above the law.

The concept of judicial independence is not judge’s personal privilege but responsibility cast on the person.

The need for transparency and accountability and that “disclosure is a facet of public interest”.

Judicial independence is not secured by secrecy.

Disclosure of details of serving judges' personal assets is not a violation of their right to privacy.

Judiciary cannot function in total insulation as Judges enjoy constitutional post and discharge public duty.

Failure to bring about accountability reforms would erode trust in the courts' impartiality, harming core judicial functions.
Although education might have increased private benefits, it could have led to socially unproductive activities as well.

Government employees resorting to rent-seeking (corruption) was one such way.

Surplus supply of educated labour in the wake of weak demand leading to diminishing returns to an educated workforce.

Poor-quality education not generating any benefits.

Rapid growth of China’s higher education as a result of the focus it has been given in the country’s 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans

China has been devoting the bulk of its resources to “elite universities”.

China’s higher education sector also saw a wave of mergers of small institutes and universities into larger universities.

Chinese universities have also been using funds generated from profits of university-owned companies.

Growth in national income did not result in an increase of public expenditure for education as a whole.

There is a major reduction in the effort to uphold the minimum acceptable levels of quality of education particularly in State institutions.

There is considerable unevenness in the distribution of public finances.

Subsidies for premier institutions like the IITs and engineering colleges are incomparably higher than those for liberal arts institutions.

There are major disparities in allocation of funds per student in Central universities and State universities, and between colleges in the metropolises and those in the towns, between mainstream and distance education.

Institutions where the poor and the marginalised access higher education, are likely to get a considerably smaller share of funding.

Expenditure recovery from students can be set at 20% ceiling as recommended by the Punnayya Committee and National Knowledge Commission.

Differential fee structures based on income levels

Levying a graduate tax on employers hiring graduates.

An effective policy would require that the ongoing debates and experiences of various models of higher education functioning are critically examined.

The debate on the desirability of subsidies for higher education is an old one in economics.

It is linked to the question of how beneficial it is in the creation of a developed and egalitarian society.

The demand for public education has been growing.

Public universities are still flag bearers of good education and this true all over the world.

Subsidy in education produces positive externalities such as health improvement, and reduction in population growth, poverty and crime, and strengthening of democracy.

An educated citizenry extends benefits to the society at large.

Higher education has expanded both through public and private institutions.

There are many first-generation aspirants and they are seeking access to higher education, particularly in public institutions.

Large numbers of the poor and the marginalised are beginning to express their aspirations for social mobility through access to public higher education.

Public provisioning of higher education can also serve as an important tool in reducing inequality.

No public funding invariably means that students have to pay for most of the costs involved, often by taking loans.

As many students in the US are discovering today, a bleak macroeconomic outlook may mean that it takes a long time for students to pay back the debt.

Bright children are there in poor families too.

We cannot have a society where 50% of the people are poor; we will lose a lot of talent if they don’t get in.

Education is one of those genuinely long-term businesses.

The state has to fund this need of the future as a priority. If it does not do it, it is neglecting the country’s future.

Inclusiveness and equity are very important characteristics of a good public institution.

Public higher education cannot have any equity or inclusiveness without public funding, and subsidising it.

Direct economic gains, such as research leading to the invention of vaccines and new technology.

Indirect gains, such as an increase in tax collection, a more flexible workforce that can adapt to the changing demands of the market.

Greater appreciation of social diversity, leading to greater harmony.
States such as Haryana, Rajasthan, and Punjab have already undertaken programmes that raise awareness about safe and unsafe touch in schools.

Government schools across India are also educating children from classes 2 to 7 about the concept of ‘Good Touch, Bad Touch’ under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

Structural problem in the legal system, it is biased and derogatory towards victims of child sexual abuse.

As children typically delay disclosure of abuse, chances are that medical evidence may go undetected or get lost, thus hampering their chances of securing justice.

Delayed disclosure also makes it difficult for child witnesses to recall specific details of the abuse.

Not knowing how to narrate what exactly happened to them, children typically provide vague and sketchy responses instead of using standard terms that describe body parts.

The justice process appears frightening to child survivors because no one has educated them about the practices of the court.

More often than not, the perpetrators are those who are known to the child, perhaps even family members themselves.

One of the main barriers to sexuality education could be concerns that this type of education is at odds with local cultural or religious beliefs around sexuality.

There is a compelling need to increase the awareness of the legal system about child-sensitive communication.

Every school should have an established protocol to deal with instances of child sexual abuse in the school.

It must be made mandatory for the school principal to report any incident involving child sexual abuse to the local police station on the day that it is reported.

Parents must be educated about the concept of safe and unsafe touch themselves so that they stay vigilant and reinforce the concept at home as well.

The ecosystem of safety for children must place their wellbeing at its heart, with teachers, parents and law enforcement authorities standing guard to protect them from sexual predators.

The prevalence of child sexual abuse cases across India has made headlines multiple times.

A good education should go beyond the traditional academic focus.

Comprehensive sexuality education must be an essential part of a good education that helps prepare young people to make well-informed decisions.

In a recent judgment, the Madras High Court ruled that courts should not be influenced by misconceptions that children are likely to lie in cases of sexual abuse or that they are tutored by parents to make false statements in court.

Children must be educated not only about the nature of sexual abuse, but also the procedures to invoke formal justice mechanisms.

It is imperative to introduce sexuality education in the school curriculum, underpinned by concepts of criminology and criminal justice.

It will prepare children to recognise inappropriate behaviour and promptly report such behaviour.

Children need to learn the names of body parts instead of using euphemisms.

Children should be provided sexuality education so they can be equipped with the right vocabulary to talk about sexual abuse.

Teaching the correct names of private parts will also reduce the shame and stigma associated with talking about them.

It will prepare children to recognise potentially inappropriate behaviour.

Sexuality education will significantly reduce the likelihood of delayed disclosure and subsequent healing of injury on the body.

Sexuality education will thus allow children to gain knowledge about the most effective ways to respond to sexual abuse and improve outcomes.

Anganwadi workers as well as government and private school teachers must be mandatorily trained on the best and most suitable ways to impart such knowledge.

Sex education also provides an opportunity to instil family values in the kids.

Sexuality education empowers young people to question their social context and challenge negative social norms, including gender norms.

Without access to good quality comprehensive sexuality education, we cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals we have set for 2030.
The RCEP deal format required India to abolish tariffs on more than 70% of goods from China, Australia and New Zealand, and nearly 90% goods from Japan, South Korea and ASEAN.

This would have made imports to India, cheaper.

15 remaining nations will begin formal work towards inking the pact in 2020 while still making efforts to resolve India’s objections.

India’s final decision will depend on satisfactory resolution of these issues.

India still uses tariffs to protect the significant levels of vulnerabilities, especially in agriculture but also in the manufacturing sector.

With generally low tariffs on most manufactured imports, moderately high tariffs are imposed on agricultural imports.

India’s domestic industries would be protected from intense competition and more importantly, Chinese dumping.

It is a relief, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

The move has given enough room to India to be able to bilaterally resolve its issues with other countries.

With all the FTAs with ASEAN, Korea and Japan, India has run increasing trade deficits, essentially because the exports have not seen the desired levels of expansion.

This is because of the lack of competitiveness of Indian enterprises, both in agriculture and the manufacturing sectors.

India is already grappling with a fiscal deficit.

Successive governments have not focused on policies that can increase the efficiency of domestic enterprises.

China and Thailand are emerging as a new services hub for attracting FDI.

Uncompetitiveness of Indian exports India’s export-to-GDP ratio dipped from 25.3 per cent in 2012/13 to 19.7 per cent by the end of 2017/18.

The government must focus on the mechanisms through which India can create globally competitive sectors that can demand market access in India’s partner countries.

India will have to accelerate reforms to make exports more competitive.

Making available round-the-clock good quality electricity, cheap and efficient logistics, and access to cheaper and quality capital.

Recently India decided to withdraw from the 16-member mega regional free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

In FY19, India registered trade deficit with 11 RCEP countries.

India’s trade deficit with the RCEP countries stood at $105 billion in fiscal 2019.

Concerns expressed by farmers, trade unions, major industry associations and civil society organisations about the adverse implications of import liberalisation.

The small and marginal farmers and their inability to face competition from global agri-business has been the primary reason why the government has always excluded agriculture from import liberalisation, both in WTO as well as in bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs).

In the FTAs with the ASEAN, Korea and Japan, most of the major agricultural products were excluded from import tariff cuts.

The RCEP threatened to alter the template of import protection.

RCEP aims at progressively eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantially all trade.

It left little scope for India to maintain its regime of import protection in response to domestic vulnerabilities, for example in agriculture.

China would have had to be given similar levels of market access.

India’s manufacturing sector faces an increasing threat from cheap Chinese products.

Imports from China increased from less than $11 billion in the middle of the previous decade to over $78 billion in 2017-18.

This could quickly increase further when India grants preferential tariffs to China as a part of the RCEP.

RCEP will help advance China’s efforts in stabilising foreign trade and foreign capital.

Australia has large export interests in wheat and sugar, two of the most politically sensitive commodities for India.

Australia had initiated a dispute against India in the WTO arguing that subsidies granted to sugarcane producers violate the rules of the Agreement on Agriculture.

New Zealand milk producers are more efficient than India’s small producers, which would have given the former a price advantage in India’s market.

India as the fastest growing economy has now been replaced by significantly lower growth expectations.

An aggressive opening of the Indian economy would have only added to the uncertainties faced by the domestic entities, and its impact on the labour market.
Saudi Arabia is an important and reliable source of India's energy requirements. India imports around 18% of its crude oil from Saudi Arabia, making it the 2nd-largest source of crude oil for the country.

India and Saudi Arabia have traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations. The number of high-level visits by political leaders from both countries manifests the strategic importance accorded by both countries to one another.

There is a substantive shift happening in India's approach to the Middle East policy. India has pushed an aggressive strategy of partnering with key regional powers like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel in a bid to attract investments and forge deeper security partnerships.

Defence is one of the important areas of bilateral cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Defence, security, trade, culture, education and people-to-people contacts are important areas of bilateral cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

India and Saudi Arabia are moving from a purely buyer-seller relationship towards a closer strategic partnership that will include Saudi investments in downstream oil and gas projects.

Pragmatism is dictating Saudi posture as the very future of the kingdom's economic model is at stake. Economic reform programs are underway in Saudi Arabia, for which it needs India's economic as well as technological assistance.

There is a substantive shift happening in India's approach to the Middle East policy. India has pushed an aggressive strategy of partnering with key regional powers like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel in a bid to attract investments and forge deeper security partnerships.

Saudi Arabia appears to have limited experience in countering threats from groups like Houthi militias. This is an area where India's expertise in fighting such threats could be imparted to the Saudi side, by enhancing joint military training programs.

Economic reform programs are underway in Saudi Arabia, for which it needs India's economic as well as technological assistance.

Saudi Arabia has given a positive approach towards abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. Saudi Arabia has signalled that it understands Indian concerns and sensitivities on the Kashmir issue.

The politics of the Middle East are complex and multidimensional. The Saudi Arabia-Turkey rivalry is one of the dimensions. Another dimension is the Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry.

India has close relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, India is yet to work out a way to balance its ties with Iran on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and the United States on the other.

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Uplifting cooperation in the maritime security domain from the current status would be in the interest of both countries. Holding joint naval exercises is important for maritime security cooperation as well as to safeguard international trade via sea routes.

The potential areas for next stage of bilateral cooperation could be greater bilateral synergy in Indian infrastructure, agriculture, start-ups, skills and IT.

India could explore the possibility to engage with the newly established Saudi Space Agency. Space is an important domain where bilateral engagements could be strengthened.

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If India is to counter the growing influence of China in the region, strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia could be the answer. India and Saudi Arabia have traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations.

Saudi Arabia took a positive approach towards abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Formation of the India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council that will be led by the leaders of both the countries to "help India address its expectations and aspirations."

India has given a positive approach towards abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. Saudi Arabia has signalled that it understands Indian concerns and sensitivities on the Kashmir issue.

The current scenario is unlike the Cold War period when India-Saudi Arabia ties were mainly determined by the Pakistani factor.

There is strong political will in both India and Saudi Arabia to take relations to new heights.

For decades, this prevented both New Delhi and Riyadh from discovering the strategic importance of engaging one another.

India and Saudi Arabia have traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations. The number of high-level visits by political leaders from both countries manifests the strategic importance accorded by both countries to one another.

With India's growing interest in energy cooperation, there are many potential areas for enhanced cooperation. India is seeking to diversify its energy mix and reduce its dependence on oil imports from the Middle East.

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Introduction

The 11th BRICS summit concluded in Brazil with calls for strengthening multilateralism and reforming global institutions such as the UN Security Council (UNSC), World Trade Organisation, World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Initially, BRICS mainly had an economic agenda but gradually, the scope has widened to include security, health, science and technology, culture and civil society.

India and China have kept afloat the grouping with their growth.

BRICS has been dimmed by sluggish growth in Brazil and South Africa, and Russia’s sanction-laden slowdown.

However, the group has adapted to the times and proven its resilience.

Concerns / Challenges

Despite their combined population accounting for 40% of humanity, intra-BRICS trade still makes up just 15% of world trade.

The New Development Bank’s (NDB) vision to ‘supplement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development’ remains far away from realisation.

So far the only members of NDB are its founders.

Lack of transparency and good governance among member states with the bank.

Politically, these countries are not all on the same page at the same time.

Concerns / Challenges

China has been shielding Pakistan and has been uneasy discussing the issue of terrorism on this platform.

Lack of a binding ideology, bilateral differences, diversity in terms of socio-cultural and political systems.

China’s overwhelming presence, which reduces the space for other countries in the grouping.

Way Forward

BRICS countries need greater connectivity and more inter-grouping trade to get ahead.

Countries must focus on resolving their trade issues through the recently launched mechanism led by Finance Ministers.

New Development Bank must work on its mandate.

Securing more clean energy funding, particularly in solar energy, from the NDB.

A strong partnership among BRICS nations on innovation and digital economy can spur growth, promote transparency and support the sustainable development goals.

Need for India and China to increase cooperation on issues like river water (Brahmaputra) data sharing, entry of Indian pharmaceutical companies in China, etc.

India must continue to work with other BRICS countries to reach an understanding with China on the issue of cross-border terrorism.

Climate governance is an area where BRICS members have a lot of potential to contribute.

Significance of BRICS for India

From the Indian perspective, BRICS has emerged the voice of developing countries, or the global south.

With raising challenges on issues from WTO to climate change, New Delhi believes BRICS has to protect the rights of the developing countries.

India has to maintain the balancing act between Russia-China on one side and the US on the other.

BRICS has put counter-terrorism on top of the agenda, this has been a success for India.

India is making efforts to address glaring gaps in areas such as counter-terrorism, the fight against climate change and UNSC reform.

India was the main BRICS country behind the establishment of the NDB and proposed the idea at the fourth BRICS summit in New Delhi.

2021 BRICS Summit is scheduled in India.
National action plan to combat antibiotic resistance.

The campaign — 'Medicines with the Red Line', which involves packs of certain medicines carrying a 'red line' to differentiate them from other drugs.

Indian Council of Medical Research has issued new national guidelines on the use of antibiotics.

Government Initiatives

Public awareness messages on state-run radio channels cautioning patients against taking antibiotics without a prescription.

Tackling the superbug problem requires massive data collection and analysis.

Health departments of the Central and state governments must work in coordination with nodal bodies in the technology space to develop an information-sharing grid.

Data analytics to track the correlation between antibiotic consumption and induced drug resistance.

Access to this online database can help physicians track ABR patterns; predict health outcomes; and prescribe drugs suitable for patient needs.

Big Data analytics promise a significant step towards personalized medicine.

Lack of infrastructure and inadequate diagnostic facilities in our health-care sector is one of the major triggers of the irrational antibiotic use by doctors and the public.

Unfortunately, the medical community is under the erroneous impression that doctors created the superbug crisis.

Absence of any great success even post the Chennai declaration of 2012.

Antimicrobial resistance threatens the effective prevention and treatment of an ever-increasing range of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, urinary tract infection (UTI) and even HIV.

Many hospitals, nursing homes and family doctors continue to over-prescribe antibiotics, fuelling drug resistant infections.

There was an incident where an American woman who had travelled to India died of a rare superbug.

Lack of regulatory provisions for the use of antimicrobial in cattle, chickens and pigs raised for domestic consumption.

Unless we correct the root causes, rational antibiotic usage can ever be implemented.

Promote research and development of new antibiotics to address the problem of growing global resistance to antimicrobial medicines.

Digital prescriptions prove to be an apt solution to the menace by enabling right medicine for the right patient in the right amount.

The ministries of environment, animal husbandry, agriculture and the department of pharmaceuticals should jointly strategise to contain AMR.

Behavioural change plays an important role, stricter rules, effective enforcement and not mere penalty is the solution.

Improving cleanliness in hospitals and sanitation in the community is much more important.

Research on nano technology and quantum dots to attack these superbugs.

Introduction

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the ability of a microorganism to stop an antimicrobial from working against it. As a result, standard treatments become ineffective, infections persist and may spread to others.

AMR in certain cases occurs through the natural evolution of resistance in bacterial pathogens.

The rising consumption of antibiotics is a major contributor.

Free movement of ABR across boundaries, with serious consequences.

Domestic factors such as a weak public health system, cheap antibiotics available in the market, and their unregulated use, have created ideal conditions for superbugs.

Poor regulation of pharmacies and large number of unqualified personnel into the supply chain.

Lack of awareness among patients regarding the appropriate use of antibiotics has led to selfmedication.

Non-adherence to the prescribed course of antibiotics, further intensifying the problem.

The misuse of high-end antibiotics for treatment of common health conditions gives rise to these bacteria.

Antibiotic stewardship refers to a set of coordinated strategies to improve the use of antimicrobial medications with the goal of enhancing patient health outcomes, reducing resistance to antibiotics, and decreasing unnecessary costs.

Antibiotic stewardship is considered to be the most important intervention to tackle superbug crisis.

However, 100% success of antibiotic stewardship among doctors to rationalise antibiotic use can correct only one-tenth of the global antibiotic misuse.

Antibiotic stewardship efforts by various medical societies in our country have significantly raised awareness of the super bug problem among the medical community.

It is doubtful whether this awareness translated into rational antibiotic usage.

Present Status

Globally, thousands succumb to untreatable superbug infections on a daily basis.

Irrational antibiotic usage is a major reason behind this.

Excessive usage of antibiotics creates resistance.

Over two-thirds of the antibiotics manufactured by the pharmaceutical industry are used as growth promoters for poultry and cattle.

The remaining one-third is used to treat human ailments.

Of this, the common public purchases more than half without a doctor's prescription, according to WHO.
In the United States, the Clean Air Act has proven that public health and economic progress can go together. The aggregate national emissions of the six common pollutants in the USA dropped an average of 73% from 1970 to 2017. After declaring a war on pollution, Chinese cities reduced particulate concentration by 32% in 2018.

Young children's health and quality of life are being significantly affected. Currently, breathing in Delhi's air is similar to smoking 22 cigarettes in a day. Many people will experience acute respiratory and eye symptoms. The carcinogenic pollutants increase risk of stroke, heart disease and lung cancer.

Industries' disregard for the environment and lack of modern techniques in farming. Pollution caused by local sources like crop burning in neighboring states of Haryana and Punjab.

The government shows no willingness to bring a bill or law compelling central and state governments to ensure that its citizens are breathing clean air. With little to no legal mandate and a low budgetary allocation under programmes such as the National Clean Air Programme.

India's pollution liability regime has never prioritised the adverse impact of pollution on health. The sheer size of India makes rapid progress difficult like enforcing ban on farmers burning stubble after harvest.

We should devise a more robust, permanent solution to the problem of pollution. This forms the basis of the need for amending the 1981 Air Act and making it more compatible with contemporary India. Higher targets need to be set and penalties need to be stricter.

Accountability and deterrence are essential in making sure industries comply with emission standards. Centre and states must work in synergy to ensure that targets set for the country and states are fulfilled. Greater public transparency is essential to the success of winning the war on air pollution.

Pollution control boards must be empowered sufficiently to ensure that pollution does not take more lives or hinders the overall progress of India.

Air pollution in India is not simply an environmental problem, but a major public health concern. It impacts all those breathing in the polluted air—children, the elderly, women and men alike. As Delhi's Air Quality Index crosses 500, the national capital has officially entered the public health emergency category.

Recently, the Centre for Science and Environment reported that air pollution kills an average 8.5 out of every 10,000 children in India before they turn five.

Similarly, the WHO in 2016 reported that pollution has led to the deaths of over 1 lakh children in India. Several internationally acclaimed studies have affirmed that life expectancy in India has declined anywhere between two to three years.

Statistics show that India is in a worse situation compared to its global counterparts. According to Greenpeace, 22 of the world's 30 most polluted cities are in India and Delhi has yet again bagged the position of the world's most polluted capital.

In 2018, India was placed in the bottom five countries on the Environmental Performance Index, ranking 177th out of 180 countries.

In its present form, India's Air Act does not mention or prioritise the importance of reducing the health impact of rising pollution. It is essential to retrace our steps back to the Air Act of 1981 that governs our pollution control system.

Under the 1981 Air Act, the Pollution Control Boards are presently unable to fulfill their mandate as watchdogs against polluting industries. A new bill will plug many loopholes in the 1981 Act and would align the functions and priorities of the Pollution Boards towards reducing the adverse impact of pollution on human health in India.

A new law on air pollution should protect health needs to become the central mission. If State Boards find evidence of excess air pollution, they should take all measures possible to actively disseminate this information to the masses.

While the boards cannot levy penalties, in the new law they should be empowered to encash environmental compensations from polluting industries.

Breathing clean air is the fundamental right of every Indian citizen. Human health must become a priority when it comes to legislating on air pollution.
City water systems are normatively required to comply with the national standard for drinking water. But they lack due to expanding footprint of packaged drinking water, especially in populous cities. There is high dependence on groundwater in fast-growing urban clusters where State provision of piped water systems does not exist. The Indian standard has quality requirements, including absence of viruses, parasites and microscopic organisms, and control over levels of toxic substances. In practice, municipal water fails these tests due to the lack of accountability of the official agencies. Absence of robust data in the public domain on quality testing.

While it is mandatory for bottled water manufacturers to meet quality standards, the BIS standard is voluntary for the public agencies which supply and distribute piped water. The Centre’s approach to the issue relies on naming and shaming through a system of ranking, but this is unlikely to yield results. Considering that 21 cities — including many of those found to have unclean tap water — could run out of groundwater as early as 2020, as per a NITI Aayog report. The Central Ground Water Board estimates that nearly a fifth of the urban local bodies are already facing a water crisis due to excessive extraction, failed monsoons, and unplanned development.

The response of water departments to the challenge has been to chlorinate the water supply, as this removes pathogens, ignoring the aspects as appearance, smell and taste. The solution to this problem is to make compliance of quality standards for piped water mandatory across the country. Stringent action cannot be taken unless the standard becomes mandatory. Making it legally binding on agencies to achieve standards and empowering consumers with rights is essential. State governments would then take an integrated view of housing, water supply, sanitation and waste management. A scientific approach to water management is vital. On the issue of regular testing, entrusting a separate agency with the task in each State, rather than relying on the same agency that provides water to also perform this function. If data on water are made public on the same lines as air quality, it would ratchet up pressure on governments to act.

The Central government recently released a study on the quality of piped drinking water being supplied in 21 cities across the country. The results show that tap water was "undrinkable" in as many as 13 state capitals, including Delhi.

Under its flagship Jal Jeevan Mission, the Centre aims to provide safe piped water to all households by 2024. Water samples were collected from 11 different locations and all samples drawn did not comply with the requirements of the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). The samples failed in several of the parameters. Delhi did not comply with the quality norm and the piped water was not safe for drinking purpose.

Cities, including Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Jaipur and Lucknow, where all tested samples failed to meet the BIS norms for piped drinking water. Mumbai is the only city where all samples of tap water met all the tested parameters. The Water report card. Samples from Delhi failed in 19 out of 28 parameters, the highest among major State capitals, followed by Kolkata and Chennai. Parameters in which the three cities failed were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kolkata</th>
<th>Aluminium, Barium, Coliform, colour, E. Coli, Magnesium, TDS, total alkalinity, total hardness, turbidity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chennai</td>
<td>Ammonia, Boron, Chloride, Coliform, Flouride, odour, TDS, total hardness, turbidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>Aluminium, Ammonia, Anionic detergent, Calcium, Chloride, Coliform, colour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Startup India was initiated in 2016 to build a strong ecosystem that is conducive for the growth of startup businesses.

The Indian startup ecosystem has evolved dynamically over the last two decades. The Indian market offers many opportunities for startups and in turn, startups carry great hopes to promote growth and create employment.

India is home to the world’s third largest startup ecosystem, having added over 1,300 tech startups in 2019. India now hosts 24 unicorns—a term to describe startups valued at $1 billion— the third-highest number of unicorns in a single country in the world.

The volume of investments in startups also grew. Startups created 60,000 direct jobs in 2019 alone.

The start-up landscape in the country is becoming the epitome of innovation, with companies bringing out solutions that are aimed at solving locally relevant issues.

Startups can act as vehicles for socio-economic development and transformation.

India has immense potential both in terms of technological innovation and implementation of business models.

In light of the current economic environment, IPOs from India into the US could emerge over the next 12 to 18 months.

India is one of the fastest-growing large economies in the world.

Indian market is perceived as being capable of offering an abundance of opportunities for startups.

Half of the country’s population are below the age of 25 years and the youth is aspirational.

Startups are expected to create jobs that will narrow the high unemployment rate in the country. In 2018, startups accounted for 2.64 percent of the total jobs created in India.

The Agri-tech segment is growing at a phenomenal rate of 25% year-on-year.

Experts view the agri-tech innovation industry as the primary driver of agricultural economics by 2020.

The need for technological innovation to find solutions to everyday problems is the need of the hour.

Agri-tech startups have a vast scope to enhance livelihood opportunities in rural India.

Intervention in sustainable agricultural processes will contribute tremendously to rural economic development and food security goals in the country.
Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) under the Ministry of Finance has been made the nodal department for the strategic stake sale. This was done with a view to streamlining and speeding up the process and reducing the role of administrative ministries.

DIPAM and NITI Aayog will now jointly identify PSUs for strategic disinvestment. At some point, there would be nothing left to sell and cushion the fiscal deficit with. It has been unsuccessful to sell the debt-laden and loss-ridden airline for a while now.

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, which made a loss of Rs 7,500 crore for the first half of this fiscal, may not find a buyer easily. Protest from PSU insiders The risk of cronyism. There is opposition on grounds of interest of stakeholders (for example, employees of CPSE) or ideology (for example, those against privatisation).

Even if an open and competitive process is run, a challenge in courts cannot be avoided. The strategic sale process needs to be transparent with a minimum reserve price that does justice to the valuable assets being auctioned off.

A third-party valuation of every PSU’s assets and a minimum number of bidders, can be necessary pre-condition with each sale. Spending the sums raised from such strategic sales in long-term infrastructure assets that can yield enduring returns to the economy.

Government can redirect these disinvestment proceeds into National Investment and Infrastructure Fund. The government should look into strengthening the regulatory framework that ensures efficient market conditions.

The government announced that it would sell stakes in several public sector undertakings (PSUs) and even give up management control in some. The move is expected to raise as much as Rs 1 lakh crore.

A strategic sale by a government is one where the management control is ceded to the buyer.

Some believe that “the government has no business being in business.” The government’s role is to facilitate a healthy business environment To earn additional income from the proceeds of a stake sale. The government has to spend higher amounts on infrastructure to boost economic growth, along with its commitments on health and education.

India is currently facing an economic slowdown in which indirect tax collections are below par. The government has cut corporate tax rates. As a result of cut and to-be-cut tax rates, the government would have less and less cash for its own expenditure in infrastructure and the social sector.

Disinvestment proceeds will be critical for the government to stick to its Fiscal Deficit target. If the fiscal deficit goes out of hand, global rating agencies lower the country’s investment grade.

This would make any future foreign currency loans costlier. Here is where proceeds from strategic sales give the government extra spending cushion.

Government presence distorts competitive dynamics for private players. Economic potential of such entities may be better discovered in the hands of the strategic investors due to various factors, e.g. infusion of capital, technology up-gradation and efficient management practices.

It also results in consumers and taxpayers bearing the brunt of inefficient PSU operations. Success stories like Hindustan Zinc’s, which has seen a hundred-fold increase in its profits, since its takeover by Vedanta in 2002.