INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

August 2020
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"SWARAJ IS MY BIRTHRIGHT, AND I SHALL HAVE IT!"

Introduction:

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the foremost leader of India’s freedom struggle before the advent of the Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi era, breathed his last, after a brief illness, in Bombay in the early hours of August 1, 1920.

Destiny snatched him away at a relatively young age. Had he lived longer, this lion among Indian patriots could have changed the course of the nation’s freedom struggle for the better.

Tilak was the tallest of the leaders of his generation who prepared the nation for the trials and triumphs of the Gandhian era.

First leader to recognise the importance of Identity:

Identity was once considered a primordial subject by the social science fraternity. But, then, there was a significant change.

Many social scientists recognised the importance of identity as a factor that motivates human enterprise.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was perhaps the first political leader in modern India to appreciate the importance of identity issues.

He realised that these could be a tool to make inroads in the minds of an otherwise docile society.

Once that was done, people could be motivated to join the struggle for independence, which explains Tilak’s clarion call for swaraj and swadeshi.

On August 1, 1920, a day before Gandhiji launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, Tilak passed away, thus marking the end of one and beginning of another era that culminated in the realisation of his dream of free India.
Lokmanya Tilak: Father of the Indian renaissance:

“Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it!””, this is the slogan that inculcated a political conscience among Indians regarding self-rule.

The slogan was given by Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Lokmanya means the man accepted by the people). Given his contribution, Tilak can be hailed as the first mass leader of the Indian Independence Movement.

Mahatma Gandhi called him ‘The Maker of Modern India’ or as British colonial authorities called him ‘The father of Indian unrest’, testifies his legacy and contribution to Indian society and freedom struggle.

As a philosopher-politician, his contribution is immense as he is said to be a pioneer of ideas of swaraj and swadeshi and used culture, education and the media.

Tilak’s clarion call for swaraj and swadeshi:

1. In both concepts, swa or self is common. Striving for self-dependence, in Tilak’s strategy, was the stepping-stone for Independence.
2. Tilak wanted to inculcate both collective thinking as well as action. For the cultivation of an enlightened mind, he used the media in the form of two newspapers, Kesari and Maratha, and national education through Deccan Education Society, an institute he established.
3. His formula for preparing the ground for political activism through culture, education and media was so powerful that later on Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar and others adopted this path.
4. His ideas of swaraj and swadeshi were anchored in making every Indian conscious of the insults and injustice meted out by the British.
5. He prepared a fertile ground for swaraj through his home-rule movement. He was clear on the aim of the home rule movement.
6. However, his swadeshi was not just about boycotting British goods. Although he used the tools of boycott and bonfire of British goods to provide a window for popular participation, his larger objective was promoting indigenous entrepreneurship.
7. Tilak wanted to promote manufacturing in India. To that end, Tilak started collecting funds for a corpus, known as Paisa Fund.
8. Through this, Tilak supported Ishwar Das Varshney, an entrepreneur who was greatly inspired by Tilak’s speech in the Surat Congress. Varshney later started Paisa Fund Glass Works at Talegaon near Pune.

Blueprint of a post-Independence India in mind:

1. Tilak almost had a blueprint of a post-Independence India in mind.
2. For him, swa-raj was also liked to swa-bhasha and swa-bhusha, i.e. mother tongue and indigenous attire.
3. Perhaps, he was the first national leader who envisioned the formation of linguistic states.
4. He spoke of how we should “form one separate state each for Marathi, Telugu and Kanarese provinces.” The principle that education should be given through the vernaculars is self-evident and clear.

5. Tilak adroitly used the two things — constitutionalism and democracy — that the British rulers used to boast about, to his maximum advantage.

6. To that end, he used both, his passion and professional acumen as editor and pleader dexterously.

7. His editorials were not only hard hitting, but well-argued and still carefully-worded in order to avoid legal implications.

8. Tilak was also known for not mincing his words. However, a scholar at heart, Tilak used both activism in the field as well as opinion to hasten slowly and attain the goal of swaraj, something his fellow Congressmen were wary of publicly speaking about at that time.

Conclusion:

The tone and tenor of his demand were strategically conciliatory. He wrote: “India was like a son who had grown up and attained maturity.

It was right now that the trustee or the father should give him what was his due. The people of India must get this effected. They have a right to do so.”

Today, when we talk about Atmanirbhar Bharat, the legacy of Tilak is carried forward.

Reviving the spirit of economic nationalism for indigenously manufactured goods and striving for social integration through culture are the features of Tilak’s strategy and they continue to be relevant even today as we observe his 100th death anniversary on August 1.
2. **New National Education Policy’s 5+3+3+4 format to replace 10+2 structure**

**Context:**

The government unveiled the **new National Education Policy** bringing a number of reforms almost after 34 years.

One of the salient features of the new education policy is replacing the 10+2 structure of school curriculum with a **5+3+3+4 curriculum structure** corresponding to age groups 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years respectively.

The **NEP committee** under **Dr Kasturirangan’s leadership** recognises this fundamental differentiator, and has laid out a far-reaching vision to create learning environments that are **multidisciplinary**, that cater to a **well-rounded education for all individuals**, and has the **immense potential to transform India’s human capital development**.
New Education Policy: Highlights

1. All higher education institutions, except legal and medical colleges, to be governed by a single regulator.
2. Common norms to be in place for private and public higher education institutions.
3. MPhil courses to be discontinued.
4. Board exams to be based on knowledge application.
5. Home language, mother tongue or regional language to be medium of instruction up to class 5.
6. Common entrance exams to be held for admission to universities and higher education institutions.
7. School curriculum to be reduced to core concepts; integration of vocational education from class 6.

New National Education Policy with focus on multi-disciplinary learning:

The focus will now be on the graded academic, administrative and financial autonomy of institutions.

The government said it plans to achieve a gross enrolment ratio of 50% by 2035 and promote multi-disciplinary and inclusive education.

School learning reforms:

The Centre said that the new education policy will focus on reducing the course burden on school students to allow activity-based learning.

It proposes that students be taught life skills along with their mandatory subjects. It will also focus on increasing the use of technology for learning.

It will break down school learning to the 5+3+3+4 format. The first five years in school will be the foundation stage.

The next three years will make up the preparatory stage (classes 3 to 5).

Classes 6 to 8 will be the middle stage and 9 to 12 will be the secondary stage. Students will be allowed to take up courses across disciplines.

Equitable and Inclusive Education:

NEP 2020 aims to ensure that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background.

Special emphasis will be given on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) which include gender, socio-cultural, and geographical identities and disabilities.

This includes setting up of Gender Inclusion Fund and also Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups.

Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the foundational stage to higher education, with support of educators with cross disability training, resource
centres, accommodations, assistive devices, appropriate technology-based tools and other support mechanisms tailored to suit their needs.

Every state/district will be encouraged to establish “Bal Bhavans” as a special daytime boarding school, to participate in art-related, career-related, and play-related activities. Free school infrastructure can be used as Samajik Chetna Kendras.

**Robust Teacher Recruitment andCareer Path:**

Teachers will be recruited through robust, transparent processes. Promotions will be merit-based, with a mechanism for multi-source periodic performance appraisals and available progression paths to become educational administrators or teacher educators.

A common National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be developed by the National Council for Teacher Education by 2022, in consultation with NCERT, SCERTs, teachers and expert organizations from across levels and regions.

**Promotion of Indian languages:**

To ensure the preservation, growth, and vibrancy of all Indian languages, NEP recommends setting an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI). National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit, strengthening of Sanskrit and all language departments in HEIs, and use mother tongue/local language as a medium of instruction in more HEI programmes.

**Internationalization of education** will be facilitated through both institutional collaborations, and student and faculty mobility and allowing entry of top world ranked Universities to open campuses in our country.

**Rationalised Institutional Architecture:**

Higher education institutions will be transformed into large, well resourced, vibrant multidisciplinary institutions providing high quality teaching, research, and community engagement.

The definition of university will allow a spectrum of institutions that range from Research-intensive Universities to Teaching-intensive Universities and Autonomous degree-granting Colleges.

Affiliation of colleges is to be phased out in 15 years and a stage-wise mechanism is to be established for granting graded autonomy to colleges.

Over a period of time, it is envisaged that every college would develop into either an Autonomous degree-granting College, or a constituent college of a university.

**Motivated, Energized, and Capable Faculty:**

NEP makes recommendations for motivating, energizing, and building capacity of faculty through clearly defined, independent, transparent recruitment, freedom to design curricula/pedagogy, incentivising excellence, movement into institutional leadership. Faculty not delivering on basic norms will be held accountable.

**Online Education and Digital Education:**
A comprehensive set of recommendations for promoting online education consequent to the recent rise in epidemics and pandemics in order to ensure preparedness with alternative modes of quality education whenever and wherever traditional and in-person modes of education are not possible, has been covered.

A dedicated unit for the purpose of orchestrating the building of digital infrastructure, digital content and capacity building will be created in the MHRD to look after the e-education needs of both school and higher education.

However, concerns that need to be addressed:

Talking about the spend of the government in education sector, “The goals of 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education and 100% in secondary school are laudable.

But when you realise it’s currently 25.8% in Higher Education & 68% in Class 9, you wonder if such targets are any more realistic than the Govt’s solar-energy commitments at Paris.

The NEP should have offered more tangible & realisable targets for research. Total investment on research & innovation in India declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.6% in 2018.

There are currently only 15 researchers in India per 100,000 of population, compared with 111 in China.

Conclusion:

These present wide-ranging reforms in the policy are aimed at making the Indian education system more contemporary and skill-oriented.

The NEP also renamed the HRD (human resource development) ministry as the education ministry.

Proper implementation of the reforms and ideas envisioned in the NEP 2020 will fundamentally transform India.

With the emphasis on knowledge-economy driven growth in the 21st century, this is precisely what India needs to dominate in the future decades of growth and drive the education requirements of our young population.

3. The future of Indian secularism

Need of Secular Education In India

- India is a multi religious and culturally varied society.
- Fanaticism, communalism and regionalism are on the increase.
- Equality, liberty, fraternity, national outlook and international understanding need to be propagated.
- We need secular education due to the erosion of values, narrow mindedness, selfishness etc.
- To train the youth to be good citizens.
- To inculcate in the youth social, moral and cultural values.
- To strengthen secularism and human relationship in India.
- To fulfill the requirements of democratic India.
Context:
Recent event of the Prime Minister attending the inauguration of Ayodhya temple under official capacity.

It is argued that this is against the principle of secularism where the state cannot promote any one religion and must treat all religions equally.

Secularism during freedom struggle:
1. Indian freedom movement was characterized by secular tradition and ethos right from the start.
2. In the initial part of the Indian freedom movement, the liberals like Sir Feroz Shah Mehta, Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale by and large pursued a secular approach to politics.
3. The constitution drafted by Pandit Moti Lal Nehru as the chairman of the historic Nehru Committee in 1928, had many provision on secularism.
4. ‘There shall be no state religion for the commonwealth of India or for any province in the commonwealth, nor shall the state, either directly or indirectly, endow any religion any preference or impose any disability on account of religious beliefs or religious status’.
5. Secularism was never meant to be the indifference to religion by our leaders and freedom fighters, who realised that India is a highly religious country.
6. That is why even the most orthodox Hindus and Muslims accepted it as a viable ideology for India.
7. But after independence Indian secularism followed a tortuous course and religious fundamentalism has grown dangerously in the last few decades.

Constitutional Articles related to Secularism:
1. Article 14 grants equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to all, Article 15 enlarges the concept of secularism to the widest possible extent by prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
2. Article 16 (1) guarantees equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters of public employment and reiterates that there would be no discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth and residence.
3. Article 25 provides ‘Freedom of Conscience’, that is, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion.
4. As per Article 26, every religious group or individual has the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes and to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.
5. As per Article 27, the state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institution.
6. Article 28 allows educational institutions maintained by different religious groups to impart religious instruction.
7. Article 29 and Article 30 provides cultural and educational rights to the minorities.
8. Article 51A i.e. Fundamental Duties obliges all the citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.
Term ‘Secular’: forty-second constitution Amendment Act of 1976

The term ‘Secular’ was added to the preamble by the forty-second constitution Amendment Act of 1976. (India is a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic, republic).

It emphasises the fact that constitutionally, India is a secular country which has no State religion.

And that the state shall recognise and accept all religions, not favour or patronize any particular religion.

Indian Secularism: Respect and critique towards all religions:

Constitutional secularism is marked by at least two features.

1. First, critical respect for all religions.
2. Unlike some secularisms, ours is not blindly anti-religious but respects religion. Unlike the secularisms of pre-dominantly single religious societies, it respects not one but all religions.
3. However, given the virtual impossibility of distinguishing the religious from the social, as B.R. Ambedkar famously observed, every aspect of religious doctrine or practice cannot be respected. Respect for religion must be accompanied by critique.
4. It follows that our state must respectfully leave religion alone but also intervene whenever religious groups promote communal disharmony and discrimination on grounds of religion (an inter-religious matter) or are unable to protect their own members from the oppressions they perpetuate (an intra-religious issue).
5. Second feature, the Indian state abandons strict separation but keeps a principled distance from all religions.
6. For instance, it cannot tolerate untouchability or leave all personal laws as they are. Equally, it may non-preferentially subsidise schools run by religious communities.
7. Thus, it has to constantly decide when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending entirely on which of these enhances our constitutional commitment to freedom, equality and fraternity.
8. This constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry.

Critical views to the present party-political secularism:

Today, Indian constitutional secularism is swallowed up by this party-political secularism, with not a little help from the Opposition, media and judiciary.

This party-political ‘secular’ state, cozing up alternately to the fanatical fringe of the minority and the majority, was readymade for takeover by a majoritarian party.

This was accomplished by removing the word ‘all’ and replacing it by ‘majority’: respect only the majority religion; never criticise it, but recklessly demonise others; and ridding the state of the corrupt practice of opportunistic distance not by restoring principled distance but magically abolishing distance altogether.

This is untramelled majoritarianism masquerading as secularism, one that opposes ‘pseudo-secularism’ without examining its own equally unethical practices.
Grounded in millennia-old pluralist traditions, it cannot easily be brushed aside. Brakes have been suddenly applied to this largely state-driven political project of dealing with inter-religious issues such as communal harmony. It has come to a screeching halt, broken down.

Way Forward:
Two crucial moves to kick-start the discourse and practice of secularism.
First, a shift of focus from a politically-led project to a socially-driven movement for justice.
Second, a shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues.
More focus on intra religious issues will ensure that inter religious issues won’t worsen further. It will give breathing space for evolving new forms of socio-religious tolerance which promote secularism, inclusion and democracy.

Conclusion:
Gandhiji’s secularism was based on a commitment to the brotherhood of religious communities based on their respect for and pursuit of truth, whereas, J. L. Nehru’s secularism was based on a commitment to scientific humanism tinged with a progressive view of historical change.

Needed today are new forms of socio-religious reciprocity, crucial for the business of everyday life and novel ways of reducing the political alienation of citizens, a democratic deficit whose ramifications go beyond the ambit of secularism.

4. During pandemic, we must keep older people engaged, not isolate them

Introduction:
The most vulnerable persons during the COVID pandemic are the elderly. If infected, their odds of survival are the lowest.
When shut away to save them from infection, they are likely to suffer from neglect from lack of care for other ailments, and loneliness. The pandemic has highlighted humanity’s dilemma of what to do with older people.

Globally, the population aged 65 and over is growing faster than other age groups. Life spans are increasing with better healthcare, nutrition and sanitation.

In 2018, for the first time in history, people aged 65 or above outnumbered children. Children are our future, no doubt.

However, the changing shape of populations threatens to bankrupt economies.

**WHO delivers advice and support for older people during COVID-19:**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the global population in drastic ways.
2. In many countries, older people are facing the most threats and challenges at this time.
3. Although all age groups are at risk of contracting COVID-19, older people face significant risk of developing severe illness if they contract the disease due to physiological changes that come with ageing and potential underlying health conditions.
4. Asking the elderly to self-isolate is one of the most effective COVID-19 prevention strategies.
5. But strong intergenerational ties and issues related to living arrangements can make physical distancing difficult for older persons.
6. About 88 per cent of elderly people in India live with their children. So, their risk of contracting the infection from family members remains high.
7. Living with the extended family may allow the elderly to access healthcare services, but a growing body of scholarship shows that it leaves them vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment.
8. On the other hand, for the 17 million who don’t live with their extended family, or have made arrangements to live separately due to COVID-19, life is lonely. They have difficulty in accessing food, water and basic services.

**Older people want to add more life to their years, not more years to their life:**

1. As well as exposing fragile business models, the pandemic has highlighted the tension between keeping old people safe and keeping them well.
2. People should be the boss of their own lives. It is better to live in a house than a warehouse.
3. All things must be considered before prescribing strong medicines. Indeed, this is why we are so careful about testing new medicines for COVID-19 before releasing them for public use.
4. The pandemic has revealed many factors that contribute to human well-being. Lockdowns a strong medicine to prevent COVID-19 deaths have harmed human well-being in many ways, by other medical problems that could not be attended to and even by starvation in poorer countries due to disruptions of the economy.
5. In India, as elsewhere, attention is focused every day on counting the deaths caused by COVID-19.
6. The other tragedies, though not counted, are visible in heart-rending images of migrants struggling to find succour, and people denied healthcare for other diseases.
Healthcare schemes like the Ayushman Bharat Yojana should have special provisions for the elderly. Telehealth and mobile home-based health care check-ups should be conducted for them.

Direct subsidies to pensioners, especially in healthcare matters, can also help them tide over these difficult times. Such measures are essential to the right of a dignified life.

**Strong local systems have done better:**

What we have learned from the pandemic is that local systems solutions, developed and implemented by communities, are necessary to solve complex problems.

Communities understand their needs and their capabilities better than experts, who are distant from them.

Collaboration on the ground has enabled many communities to prevent the spread of the pandemic, as well as taken care of other needs of their members.

In India, Kerala, with its systems of local, collaborative action, seems to have done much better than other states. Internationally, countries with strong local systems have done better.

**Case study: OPA (Older Persons’ Associations) movement:**

1. **Vietnam** seems to have survived the pandemic better than most countries. One reason is the strength of the OPA (Older Persons’ Associations) movement which the government has supported for many years.
2. OPAs operate in all districts of the country. They are adding younger members and transforming themselves into Inter-Generational Self-Help Groups.
3. They take responsibility for the most vulnerable people in their communities — most of whom are older people.
4. They also work with local officials to improve local services and infrastructure for the benefit of the whole community.
5. They are “nodes” in networks of actors who know what is required and who can, working together, improve services for everyone.
6. The older members of these groups are proving to be valuable assets for the community.
7. Moreover, because they are active and they feel valued, they add more good life to their remaining years.

**Conclusion:**

Older people have an invaluable role to play in our collective future. We must keep older people engaged, not shut them out to protect their bodies from the virus.

Unfortunately, the generic medicine of “physical distancing” to fight the pandemic has been branded as “social distancing”.

We need “social cohesion”, not “social distancing”, in communities, and in humanity as a whole, to fight this pandemic and also improve human well-being.
5. **Differential impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown**

### Introduction:

In *book, The Great Leveler*, Walter Scheidel, the Austrian economic historian, argues that **throughout human history**, there have been **four types of catastrophic events** that have led to greater economic equality: pandemic, war, revolution and state collapse.

Currently, the world is going through one of them: a **massive COVID-19 pandemic**.

In Scheidel’s analysis, the decline in inequality is a result of excess mortality that raises the price of labour.

While the validity of Scheidel’s argument for the current pandemic can only be assessed after it is over, the pandemic has been described as a leveller more loosely, both because the *disease can strike anyone*, and also because the resultant lockdowns have led to widespread **job losses and economic hardships** across the range of the income and occupational distribution.

### Widespread job losses: The marginalised sections are at risk

1. Early evidence from the United Kingdom and the United States reveals that *racial and ethnic minorities* are indeed the ones most likely at the risk of unemployment.

2. Focusing on the looser description of the pandemic as a leveller, preliminary data and early indirect evidence from several parts of the world indicate that the **incidence of the disease is not class-**
neutral: poorer and economically vulnerable populations are more likely to contract the virus as well as to die from it.

3. To the extent, economic class and social identity (e.g. race, ethnicity or caste) overlap, this suggests that socially marginalised groups would be at higher risk of mortality due to COVID-19.

4. The risks extend beyond mortality as the economic consequences of the current pandemic are likely to be most concentrated among the low wage earners, and less educated workers, segments of the labour force where racial and ethnic minorities are over-represented.

5. Thus, we cannot comment on whether certain caste groups are more vulnerable to the virus than others.

**The Indian shutdown: Differential impact on various castes:**

1. A key element of the pandemic control strategy everywhere has been to shut down economic and social activity, and to impose social distancing with varying degrees of strictness.

2. India’s lockdown, imposed in the last week of March 2020, was among the most stringent.

3. The first month of the severe lockdown, April 2020, witnessed a sharp rise in unemployment.

4. We examine shifts in employment and unemployment rates using data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)’s Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS) database.

5. We find that the proportion of employed upper castes dropped from 39% to 32% between December 2019 and April 2020, a fall of seven percentage points.

6. The corresponding fall for Scheduled Castes (SCs) was from 44% to 24%, i.e. a fall of 20 percentage points, almost three times as large.

7. For intermediate castes, Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Tribes (STs) the fall was from 42% to 34%, 40% to 26% and 48% to 33%. Thus, the fall in employment for SCs and STs was far greater in magnitude than that for upper castes.

**Education as a protective factor:**

The global evidence suggests that job losses associated with COVID-19 are much more concentrated among individuals with low levels of education and those with vulnerable jobs with no tenure or security.

We find that individuals with more secure jobs, i.e. not daily wagers, and those with more than 12 years of education, were much less likely to be unemployed in April 2020 than those with less than 12 years of education and with daily wage jobs, relative to their pre-pandemic employment status.

Thus, education did turn out to be a protective factor in the first wave of immediate post-lockdown job losses.

**Caste gaps at higher levels of education:**

1. Earlier work reveals that caste gaps at higher levels of education have either remained static or widened over the last three decades.

2. The current pandemic is further likely to exacerbate these educational differences.
3. Data from another nationally representative survey, the India Human Development Survey for 2011-12 (IHDS-II) show that 51% of SC households have adult women who have zero years of education, i.e. are illiterate, and 27% have an illiterate adult male member.

4. These proportions are in stark contrast to Upper Caste (UC) households, where the corresponding proportions are 11% and 24%, respectively.

5. Thus, in the face of current school closures, parents of SC children would be much less equipped to assist their children with any form of home learning, compared to parents of UC children.

6. This would be the case both because of educational differences among parents as well as due to other significant differences in material conditions living.

**Issue of technology access to various sections of society:**

There are many dimensions that reveal continued disparity between caste groups, which would affect the ability of Dalit and Adivasi families to access online education.

For example, the proportion of households with access to the Internet is 20% and 10% for UC and SC households, respectively. Only 49% of SCs have bank savings, as compared to 62% of UC households.

Thus, differential access to information technology, as well as disparities in the ability to invest in technology will be critical in shaping access to online education, if the pandemic forces schools to close for a substantial period of time.

**Conclusion:**

Early impacts of the pandemic-induced lockdown indicate that the resultant economic distress is exacerbating pre-existing structures of disadvantage based on social identity, and investments in education and health that close gaps between social groups would be essential to build resilience in the face of future shocks.
General Studies – II

1. PM-KISAN is not reaching all farmer households as intended

Introduction:

The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is the first universal basic income-type of scheme targeted towards landed farmers.

It was introduced in December 2018 to manage agricultural stress. Initially, the scheme was targeted at small and medium landed farmers, but with the declining growth in gross value added of the agricultural sector, it was extended to all farmers in May 2019.

The scheme was started with a view to augment the income of the farmers by providing income support to all landholding farmers’ families across the country, to enable them to take care of expenses related to agriculture and allied activities as well as domestic needs.

Under the Scheme an amount of Rs.6,000/- per year is transferred in three 4-monthly instalments of Rs.2000/- directly into the bank accounts of the farmers, subject to certain exclusion criteria relating to higher income status.

The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary’s rests with the State / UT Governments. The Union budget had allocated Rs 75,000 crore to this scheme in 2020-21.

PM-KISAN during Lockdown period:

PM-KISAN is a useful vehicle to provide support to farmers during the lockdown and it was included in the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package and on March 28 it was announced Rs 2,000 (out of Rs 6,000) would be front-loaded to 8.7 crore farmers.

The problems with identification of beneficiaries in the absence of proper land records are well-known.
Also, there’s no particular reason why landless labourers or the urban poor should be denied an income support scheme. The scheme is no long-term solution -- all it does is make life a little less difficult for many.

**Two aspects of this scheme present particular challenges:**

First, PM-KISAN is **not reaching all farmer households** as intended. Most of the farmers in UP, Haryana and Rajasthan own land and should be receiving benefits.

But **only 21 per cent of the cultivators** interviewed reported receiving the benefit. The exclusion is greater in UP than in Haryana and Rajasthan.

Second, this scheme is **not pro-poor** since recipients of PM-KISAN seemed to be **better off than the general rural population** even before the lockdown.

Given this uncertainty over the reach of PM-KISAN and its targeting, the relevance of the scheme needs to be carefully evaluated during this period.

**PM-KISAN is not reaching all farmer households:**

1. In a survey, the proportion of households that had to borrow to meet their day-to-day consumption needs during the lockdown was relatively low for the farmers (34 per cent) compared to casual wage workers and business households.

2. While 7 per cent of farm households suffered from occasional unavailability of food during the lockdown, this figure was much higher for casual workers (24 per cent) and business households (14 per cent).

3. On the whole, when compared to **non-recipients of PM-KISAN** (including both farm and non-farm households), these households exhibited lower signs of economic distress.

4. **About 35 per cent of rural PM-KISAN recipients** suffered income losses to a large extent in comparison to more than half of the non-recipients.

5. A little more than a third of PM-KISAN recipients borrowed money during this period as against 48 per cent of non-recipients.

6. However, these households were somewhat better off than the general rural population even before receiving PM-KISAN benefits.

7. Thus, their relative immunity to the income shock may not be solely due to PM-KISAN.

8. Due to the **volatile market and price fluctuations** in different regions, it is important to index the cash transfers to local inflation.

9. Also, the failure of Direct Benefit Transfer in kerosene in Rajasthan is a case in point, where the cash transferred to families has been insufficient to purchase kerosene, as the market price increased substantially.

10. The scheme does not provide a clear design of transfers and a framework for effective grievance redress.

**Other Important Income Support Schemes for Farmers:**

**Rythu Bandhu scheme (Telangana)/Farmers’ Investment Support Scheme (FISS):**
1. It is a welfare program to support farmer’s investment for two crops a year.
2. The government is providing 58.33 lakh farmers, Rs.4000 per acre per season to support the farm investment, twice a year, for rabi and kharif seasons.
3. This was the first direct farmer investment support scheme in India, where the cash is paid directly.

**Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA):**

1. State Government of Odisha aims to lend farmers with an **all-inclusive and flexible support system**, ensuring accelerated agricultural prosperity.
2. It will cover **92% of the small and marginal farmers** of the State. An amount of Rs.10,000 per family at the rate of Rs.5,000 for Kharif and Rabi shall be provided as financial assistance for taking up cultivation.
3. The farmers will have complete independence to take up interventions as per their needs.
4. This component is not linked to extent of land owned and will greatly benefit share croppers and actual cultivators most of whom own very small extent of land.

**Conclusion:**

The impact of a welfare measure such as PM-KISAN can only be realised through financial support that provides farmers with **adequate purchasing power to meet their daily basic necessities**. Therefore, to be effective, any cash transfer scheme should first ensure that there is enough cash provided to help bring an affected community out of poverty.

A direct transfer scheme like PM-KISAN is a game-changer and can have significant effects if it is timely, not transaction cost heavy and is provided with **complementary inputs** such as extension services.

2. **More evidence of India’s food insecurity**

![A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease](image)

**Context:**
Data from the latest edition of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report show that India retains the dubious distinction of being the country with the largest population of food insecure people.

Estimates presented in the report which was released by several United Nations organisations show that the prevalence of food insecurity increased by 3.8 percentage points in India between 2014 and 2019.

By 2019, 6.2 crore more people were living with food insecurity than the number in 2014.

State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report:
The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World is an annual flagship report jointly prepared by:

1. Food and Agriculture Organization.
2. International Fund for Agricultural Development.
4. World Food Programme.
5. World Health Organization.

Objective of the report is to inform on progress towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and to provide in depth analysis on key challenges for achieving this goal in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Authoritative indicators: Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI):

1. The SOFI report, which is published annually, presents the most authoritative evaluation of hunger and food insecurity in the world.
2. Since 2017, SOFI presents two key measures of food insecurity:
3. the conventional measure called the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and a new measure called the Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI).
4. Both of these are globally-accepted indicators of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 2.1 to end hunger and food insecurity.

Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU):
PoU is focused on estimating the proportion of population facing chronic deficiency of calories, the PMSFI is a more comprehensive measure of the lack of access to adequate and nutritious food.

Estimates of PoU are based on food balance sheets and national surveys of consumption.

Given that consumption surveys are done infrequently in most countries, these estimates are often based on outdated data and are revised when better data become available.

Prevalence of Moderate and Severe Food Insecurity (PMSFI):
The PMSFI is based on annual surveys that collect information on experiences of food insecurity (such as food shortages, skipping meals, and changing diet diversity because of a lack of resources).

Given the solid conceptual foundations of this methodology and the ease of collection of data, FIES and the PMFSI have been widely adopted by countries across the world.

Although FAO-GWP surveys are conducted in India, India is among the few countries that do not allow publication of estimates based on these surveys. Consequently, as in the past years, estimates of PMSFI for India are not published in SOFI.

India as a global burden of Food Insecurity:

However, interestingly, these estimates can be derived for India from the information provided in the report.

1. These estimates show that while 27.8% of India’s population suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity in 2014-16, the proportion rose to 31.6% in 2017-19.
2. The number of food insecure people grew from 42.65 crore in 2014-16 to 48.86 crore in 2017-19.
3. India accounted for 22% of the global burden of food insecurity, the highest for any country, in 2017-19.
4. It is also noteworthy that while the PMSFI increased in India by 3.7 percentage points during this period, it fell by 0.5 percentage points in the rest of South Asia.
5. India has not released the latest National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) consumption expenditure survey data for 2017-18.
6. As a result, conventional measures of poverty and food consumption are not available for recent years.
7. Lack of availability of data from this consumption survey also has implications for the FAO’s PoU estimates for India.
8. Because of a lack of regular availability of consumption survey data from most countries, the FAO uses supply-wise data on per capita food availability to measure changes in average per capita calorie intake.

Causes of suffering of Food Insecurity:

The significant rise in food insecurity, as shown by these data, is a clear manifestation of the overall economic distress during this period marked by a deepening agrarian crisis, falling investments across sectors and shrinking employment opportunities.

The latest PLFS data have shown that the unemployment rates in the recent years have been higher than in the last four decades.

It is widely believed that demonetisation and introduction of the Goods and Services Tax were two prime causes of economic distress during this period.

Conclusion:

A sudden imposition of an unprecedented and prolonged lockdown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed focus on the problems of hunger and food insecurity.
With a sudden loss of livelihoods, a vast majority of India’s poor are faced with increased food insecurity, hunger and starvation. A number of starvation deaths have also been reported in the media.

Given this, these estimates of the PMSFI provide an important baseline estimate for the situation before the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is critical for India to conduct a national survey on food insecurity to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security of different sections of the population.

3. National well-being and the counts that matter

Introduction:

Since India’s crimes data recording system is not built to capture subtleties, we do not know what proportion of pregnancies in India start off without the consent of the woman, even though the veil of marriage may cover it legally and culturally.

While physical and mental violence can be ascertained by a sensitive clinician, the intergenerational impact of a regretful and anxiety-loaded pregnancy is inadequately quantified by current clinical or epidemiological tools.

Measuring and tracking matters of import is critical to individual, community as well as national well-being.

Parameters that are valuable in child birth:

What is valuable is measured frequently, at different life stages, and at disaggregated levels:

1. Birthweights; the heights and weights of our children when they enter school; school completion rates;

2. Perhaps the age, height and weight of a first-time pregnant woman; and most definitely, the number of women in the formal workforce who are on a par with men in terms of earning.

Underage marriage of girls must become history. Ensuring secondary school completion of every child, especially girls in rural areas, has far-reaching impact, and needs to be pursued single-mindedly.

Provisioning separate, functional toilets and sanitary pads for girls, and teaching boys biology and gender differences (of their own and female) are key enablers to ensuring gender parity in school completion rates.
Teaching school-leaving girls and boys the notion of consent, and also the basics of contraception, will ensure that the start of every pregnancy will be a desired and happy one.

Desired Births in the country:

1. A desired pregnancy is to be supported by a fully functional health-care system, able to anticipate complications before time and facilitating a safe delivery.

2. Despite the trend towards nuclear families, pregnancies in India still are familial events outcomes are eagerly anticipated by more than just the parents, and stillbirths are a rude end to many fond wishes.

3. A young, short and under-schooled woman is more likely to have a bad pregnancy outcome, or, a smaller than expected baby.

4. A birth weight is much more than a number it is a complex outcome, telling of how well the woman and her family eats, her status among them, and also of any particular condition that the individual mother or new-born child has.

5. Tracking average birthweights by district and subdistrict on a regular basis is a fair proxy for food security, the status of women and the delivery of primary health care.

6. For a nation with plans to assign digital health IDs to everyone, this is not a tall ask — what is additionally required is the making of this moving average data live and visible to the people and their government.

7. It should also put to rest all debate about whether some Indians are born more equal than others.

Height-weight proportions in growth and development of a child:

1. A good start is a great advantage, but easily squandered if subsequent growth and development are blighted by the lack of adequate nutrition, first exclusively from the mother’s breast, then through locally available weaning and complementary foods; and repeated bouts of vaccine preventable or easily treatable illnesses.

2. Parental hopes of a child growing up, going to school and becoming successful hit a major hurdle if the height-weight proportions at age five are not normal.

3. Ensuring this marker is recorded for every child who enters school will also allow for a correlation with birthweights at the district level giving a better understanding of multi-dimensional property.

4. If India is to be truly taking advantage of its large birth cohort in the form of a demographic dividend, then the correlate of birthweight and five-year height-weight needs to be reviewed at the highest political levels regularly.

5. It reflects the physical and cognitive nurture of human capital that the country can bank on for its future.

6. Every child born in India is to be considered a ratna – a jewel and handled as such; some of them will go on to get the formal Bharat Ratna tag eventually.

Improved learning abilities:
Schooling is a socio-economic and gender parity springboard if school completion rates show no gender, rural-urban or parental income divides.

Consequently, India may not only bring down its maternal mortality ratios but also improve neonatal and under five mortality rates, through delayed marriages and exercising of reproductive choices by its empowered young women.

New education policy will be a best remedy if implement in letter and spirit:

1. With better cognitive capacities and supportive environment, the stress of learning reduces, and outcomes improve.
2. Improved learning should translate into better completion rates at post-secondary and baccalaureate levels but need not necessarily correspond to universal, meaningful employment.
3. It is for the government and the corporate world to make opportunities and workplaces happen, irrespective of their gender.
4. Right economic stimuli, anticipating potential workplace disruptions, supporting reskilling and retraining, and decriminalising entrepreneurial failure will go a long way in eliminating work and livelihood-related anxieties making their way back home as domestic violence.
5. Unimaginative teaching of anaemic children is a double whammy, partially addressed through protein rich mid-day meals.
6. Deworming, school toilets, sanitary pads and bicycles for girls are progressive policy steps in the right direction; adding remedial training and affirmative feedback for teachers will be transformative.
7. As a society, we need to understand and make leeway for failure, and not stigmatise it, whether at school in early childhood, during miscarriages of pregnancies, or when career and business decisions go awry.

Conclusion: Timely data helps:

Together, these measurements will tell us far more about where we are, and where we as a nation will go.

The tools to get these measurements exist; we just have to see them in real time to be able to take corrective actions where needed.

Public health is about people, their continued well-being, and not just about controlling disease outbreaks.

Data helps: timely, disaggregated, multidimensional data helps immensely in ensuring collective well-being, physical, mental and social.

People are India’s greatest possession and will remain so for the conceivable future, provided they are in a state of well-being.

An ill-educated, anxious population is a tinderbox, capable of self-harm as well as being kindling for malice-driven mobilisation.

Addressing this requires a whole of life and whole of society approach, and measuring the outcomes that matter, regularly.
4. **Online Path to Healthcare**

**Introduction:**

The **Indian healthcare system** has evolved much over the last decade, owing to the **adoption of new technologies** as well as **systemic changes** and **emphasis on service quality**. However, healthcare standards are neither uniform nor inclusive across the country.

At one end of the spectrum, are **state-of-the-art private facilities** with advanced testing and treatment technologies catering primarily to people in urban areas, and on the other, there is a void where the impoverished struggle to receive even the most basic care.

The COVID-19 crisis has made the cracks in the system appear more prominent.

**New challenges** are emerging every day, it, therefore, becomes crucial to revisit the problems and chart out a plan to fix them.

**Low health awareness** can be attributed to **poor education or functional literacy**, as well as **inadequate emphasis** at different levels. However, regional efforts to enhance awareness have generally shown promising results.

**Accessibility to quality healthcare among the rural population is another major challenge:**

1. For some, travelling to a distant hospital for treatment means losing out on daily wages, and is put off until serious complications arise.

2. A lack of accessibility to healthcare negatively affects health-seeking behaviour and has a delayed but more severe impact on the country’s healthcare burden.

3. It is important to **identify and analyse barriers** to access geographical, financial, social and systemic and sensitise people so that long-term action is taken to remove them.

4. Not only do doctors, nurses, medical and technical staff need to be trained, skilled and equipped, but their services have to be equitably distributed across regions. **Remote and rural areas are especially plagued** with staff shortages.

5. **This affects service quality and availability specialized treatments.** A clear, enforceable policy on human resources is needed to ensure that every single patient in India is taken care of by **sensitive, trained and competent healthcare worker**.

6. Public hospitals that provide low or no-cost services are perceived as unreliable or of indifferent quality. The private sector is usually the first choice for anyone who can afford it.
E-Health: a novel way to redesigning healthcare:

1. **Electronic healthcare (e-health)** will significantly alter the way physicians practise medicine.
2. Electronic medical records with specialised software programs can increase the quality of patient care, reduce unnecessary medical tests, and directly connect with pharmacies to transmit prescriptions.
3. Electronic communication allows physicians to respond to patients clinical concerns and questions, and Internet access can provide physicians better access to literature.
4. One of those e-health aspects is remote patient care, which has made considerable progress in remote monitoring of ICD patients.
5. Nevertheless, there is significant physician hesitance about implementing medical computerisation: patient email can potentially overload physicians with additional work, websites can direct patients to poor medical information, the computerised interface can degrade the patient-physician relationship, and health regulations can create concern over electronic privacy issues.
6. The finances of e-health appear promising, yet conflicting studies create uncertainty.
7. However, if managed appropriately, the potential disadvantages of e-health can be minimised, and the benefits of e-health in clinical practices can be obtained.

Healthcare sector needs to be cost conscious expenditure on unnecessary tests and procedures must be eliminated:

1. The use of oximeters skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing diagnosed patients to monitor their oxygen levels at home, without risking interaction unless necessary.
2. Clear demarcation of processes and procedures are essential to ensure accountability.
3. The problem can be solved by cultivating communicative and responsible culture, clarifying expectations and identifying the many other sectors, digital innovation can play a huge role in overcoming challenges in the healthcare sector.
4. On-demand health services, for instance, allow organisations to link doctors to patients via the in-person, web (website or app) or phone mediums. Patients can search for specialists based on their expertise and schedule to book appointments.
5. **Online patient portals** also provide medical test results, diagnosis and give patients detailed explanations of their illnesses, saving doctors precious time.
6. Devices like health rate monitors, exercise and activity trackers and sweat meters allow people to keep track of some aspects of their health without having to visit a doctor. The use of such devices can help flag irregularities at an early stage.

Several hurdles should be taken to have this achieved:

First, instead of reimbursing individual healthcare providers, it will be necessary to reimburse healthcare systems.
Second, it is important to recognise possible hesitations by the involved stakeholders. Third, it is important that data safety is ensured and monitored by an independent inspectorate. Lastly, it is vital that patients are able to refuse the exchange of their data between healthcare providers and that access rights are well described. Of course, the privacy of the patient has to be guaranteed.

Conclusion:

Other applications of technology in healthcare range from drone delivery of life-saving medicines, blood components or devices to inaccessible areas to remotely conducted robotic surgeries and even use of augmented reality (AR) glasses that could allow first responders to connect with faraway specialists in a matter of seconds.

Depending on the pace of digital adoption, these services could resolve issues of accessibility, absence, and possibly even affordability, in the long-term.

However, it cannot be overstated that solving basic healthcare challenges is crucial for ensuring universal health coverage in a manner that is equitable, fair and transparent.

5. **Education Policy does not adequately tackle issue of inequity arising out of medium of instruction**

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### BREAKFAST AT SCHOOL

**Key features of the draft National Education Policy**

**School education**
- Three years of preschool instead of two, followed by 12 years of schooling
- Free and compulsory schooling under Right to Education from preschool till Grade (Class) XII, instead of the current Class I to VIII
- A nutritious breakfast — perhaps of milk and a banana — for preschool and primary school pupils in addition to the midday meal
- Children to be exposed to multiple languages right from the "foundational stage", made up of preschool and Grades (Classes) I and II

**Higher Education**
- Four-year honours programmes for undergraduate general-stream courses
- Multiple exit options: Students can leave with a diploma after two years or with a graduate degree (without honours) after three years

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**Context:**

An astounding 34 years since its education policy was last revised, India is again at the cusp of a glorious and historic reform with the announcement of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Timely and progressive, NEP marks a monumental development in the country’s education system.
**Issue of medium of instruction:**

1. The medium of instruction has been a way of perpetuating class and caste structures in India. Accepting this reality will help us make sense of the language policy since Independence as well as the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP, 2020).

2. NEP 2020 has many positives, including not making Hindi compulsory in South Indian states.

3. The pedagogically relevant and politically sensitive issue of the medium of instruction, the policy seems to follow the well-trodden path.

4. It says that the mother-tongue or the regional language would be the “preferred” mode of instruction till Class 5, possibly Class 8.

5. Over the years, while school enrolment has increased, the quality of education in bhasha schools invariably government schools has deteriorated. At the same time, most students from the well-off sections have opted out of them.

6. This shift from bhasha schools to English-medium schools first happened in the metros, then in middle-level cities and has reached the villages now. The bhasha schools have begun drawing children from the Bahujan Samaj.

**Basha schools (regional languages) children suffer from two handicaps:**

1. First, the extremely poor quality of education in most bhasha schools — with exceptions in states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

2. Second, such children rarely have a tradition of education in their families and find it very difficult to compete with their peers who have a much better financial background, better education and proficiency in English.

3. But the benefit of expanding education is that such children, who would not ask for a better deal earlier, are now making their demands clear.

4. One remembers the agitation in 2014 when the Hindi-speaking students were arguing that the higher education system is loaded against the bhasha medium students, especially at the UPSC level.

5. There is a conflict between what the educationists say — one understands the subject best in the mother-tongue, we as a nation should not lose such a multitude of languages, studying in the English-medium leads to gaps in the understanding of one’s own society and what the parents think is necessary for the economic survival of their children.

6. So, parents send their kids to English-medium schools as soon as they can afford it. The bhasha medium students do not get the coveted jobs and the disparity between the two widens.

7. In fact, the document, iterated over the last few years, is an ode to the ideals of public policy, factoring in voices of every stakeholder from experts to teachers and the common man.

8. It is informed by insights from 2.5 lakh gram panchayats across the country.

**Concerns that need to be addressed:**

NEP 2020 does not tackle the issue of inequity that arises out of the medium of instruction.
The document pays lip-service to the promotion of bhashas, but the policy will end up reinforcing the status quo. The English-medium schools will continue as they are, rather more of them will sprout.

But the agitation of 2014 could be a harbinger of the possible political unacceptability of this “manner of doing things”.

One could let all students study English from an earlier age. Admittedly, this goes against the basic principles of education, and the non-elite will face more problems in studying English.

But an exposure to basic English from a very young age in bhasha schools through rhymes, simple sentences could make learning the language later much easier.

Making special funds available for English-teaching at panchayat or zila parishad level schools could also help. These could be some steps in making school education somewhat more egalitarian.

The challenge is to implement this policy in letter and spirit. There is a need to create comprehensive, efficient and realistic guidelines and framework.

Moral and Basic education is the need of the hour:

In sum, the NEP will strengthen the fundamentals of moral and basic education and provide opportunities for equitable and qualitative development that is sensitive to local cultural contexts and global possibilities.

This, in turn, will lead to the development of an innovative, analytical, just and aware Indian consciousness expediting the development of a prosperous and self-reliant nation (Aatmanirbhar Bharat).

As with every policy, the real test of NEP will be translating it to action.

Backed by expeditious and effective implementation in sync with its spirit, NEP could shape the lives of our future generations.

Through a robust education system, leveraging the full potential of its demographic dividend, India has taken a giant leap towards establishing itself as a knowledge superpower.

Way Forward:

The policy aims for the all-round growth of every student in scholastic and co-scholastic domains and emphasises educating the students, teachers, and parents to nurture their potential to serve the nation.

Its flexibility allows learners to select their preferred field of study and subsequent path in life following their academic and professional inclination and interests.

The policy will prove extremely beneficial in dismantling hierarchies and barriers between different knowledge streams by providing easy and accessible methodologies.

It will promote co-curricular activities and learning techniques in professional and academic streams. This will pave the way for a new multi/trans-disciplinary education system.

The NEP will help to replace the rote method of learning and examination-based education with a system based on conceptual understanding that aims to hone the student’s analytical skills.

6. India’s population data and a tale of two projections
A new study, published in the highly regarded journal, The Lancet, and prepared by the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), has shaken up the world of population policy.

It argues that while India is destined to be the largest country in the world, its population will peak by mid-century. And as the 21st century closes, its ultimate population will be far smaller than anyone could have anticipated, about 1.09 billion instead of approximately 1.35 billion today. It could even be as low as 724 million.

The IHME population projections are also subject to underlying assumptions that deserve careful scrutiny. They predict that by the year 2100, on average, Indian women will have 1.29 children.

Fertility rate of India by 2050 and 2100:

1. Since each woman must have two children to replace herself and her husband, this will result in a sharp population decline.
2. Contrast this predicted fertility rate of 1.29 for India with the projected cohort fertility of 1.53 for the United States and 1.78 for France in the same model.
3. It is difficult to believe that Indian parents could be less committed to childbearing than American or French parents.
4. Until 2050, the IHME projections are almost identical to widely-used United Nations projections.
5. The UN projects that India’s population will be 1.64 billion by 2050, the IHME projects 1.61 billion by 2048.
6. It is only in the second half of the century that the two projections diverge with the UN predicting a population of 1.45 billion by 2100, and the IHME, 1.09 billion.
7. Part of this divergence may come from IHME model’s excessive reliance on data regarding current contraceptive use in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and potential for increasing contraceptive use.
8. Research at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) National Data Innovation Centre shows that contraceptive use in the NFHS is poorly estimated, and as a result, unmet need for contraception may be lower than that estimated by the IHME model, generating implausibly low fertility projections for 2100.

Fertility decline:

Regardless of whether we subscribe to the UN’s projections, or the IHME projections, India’s demographic future contains a peaking and subsequently declining population driven by a sharp reduction in fertility.

In the 1950s, India’s Total fertility rate (TFR) was nearly six children per woman; today it is 2.2.

Ironically, the massive push for family planning coupled with forced sterilisation during the Emergency barely led to a 17% decline in TFR from 5.9 in 1960 to 4.9 in 1980. However, between 1992 and 2015, it had fallen by 35% from 3.4 to 2.2.

What happened to accelerate fertility decline to a level where 18 States and Union Territories have a TFR below 2, the replacement level?

One might attribute it to the success of the family planning programme but family planning has long lost its primacy in the Indian policy discourse.

Between 1975 and 1994, family planning workers had targets they were expected to meet regarding sterilisations, condom distribution and intrauterine device (IUD) insertion. Often these targets led to explicit or implicit coercion. Following the Cairo conference on Population and Development in 1994, these targets were abandoned.

If carrots have been dropped, the stick of policies designed to punish people with large families has been largely ineffective.

Punitive policies include denial of maternity leave for third and subsequent births, limiting benefits of maternity schemes and ineligibility to contest in local body elections for individuals with large families.

Aspirational revolution: socio-economic transformation of India:

1. If public policies to encourage the small family norm or to provide contraception have been lackadaisical, what led couples to abandon the ideal of large families?

2. It seems highly probable that the socioeconomic transformation of India since the 1990s has played an important role.

3. Over this period, agriculture became an increasingly smaller part of the Indian economy, school and college enrolment grew sharply and individuals lucky enough to find a job in government, multinationals or software services companies reaped tremendous financial benefits.

4. Parents began to rethink their family-building strategies. Where farmers used to see more workers when they saw their children, the new aspirational parents see enrolment in coaching classes as a ticket to success.

5. The literature on fertility decline in western countries attributes the decline in fertility to retreat from the family: Indian parents seem to demonstrate increased rather than decreased commitment to family by reducing the number of children and investing more in each child.
6. However, smaller families invest more money in their children by sending them to private schools and coaching classes. It is not aspirations for self but that for children that seems to drive fertility decline.

**In language of the past:**

Ironically, even in the face of this sharp fertility decline among all segments of Indian society, the public discourse is still rooted in the language of the 1970s and on supposedly high fertility rate, particularly in some areas such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar or among some groups such as women with low levels of education or Muslims.

This periodically results in politicians proposing remedies that would force these ostensibly ignorant or uncaring parents to have fewer children.

**Conclusion:**

Demographic data suggest that the aspirational revolution is already under way.

What we need to hasten the fertility decline is to ensure that the health and family welfare system is up to this challenge and provides contraception and sexual and reproductive health services that allow individuals to have only as many children as they want.

In order to maximise the demographic dividend, we must invest in the education and health of the workforce, particularly in States whose demographic window of opportunity is still more than a decade away.

Staying fixated on the notion that revising State allocation of Central resources based on current population rather than population from 1971 punishes States with successful population policies is short-sighted.

This is because current laggards will be the greatest contributors of the future for everyone, particularly for ageing populations of early achievers. Enhancing their productivity will benefit everyone.

It is time for India to accept the fact that being the most populous nation is its destiny. It must work towards enhancing the lives of its current and future citizens.

7. **PM Modi’s digital push for national health ID**

![Image of the National Digital Health Mission](image)

**Context:**
During the Independence Day Speech, PM Modi launched the **National Digital Health Mission** and said that the initiative which is completely technology based will revolutionise the health sector in India.

The COVID-19 crisis has emerged as a turning point for healthcare-provider and patient relations.

Away from the headlines of the tragic loss of lives, the exponential increase in cases, economic morass and social disruptions, emerges a deeper subtext on how the healthcare sector is viewed and treated.

Reports of healthcare workers protesting the shortage of equipment, patients charging doctors and hospitals for profiteering, policy makers issuing edicts against providers and reported cases of hoarding of essential medicines have all thrown light on a longstanding problem.

**What is a digital health ID?**

Think of it as a digi-locker for all medical and healthcare-related details of an individual, right from birth.

A **14-digit serial number** will be generated for each individual. The card will store immunisation details, surgeries, laboratory tests, hospitals visited, pharmacies, medical purchases, etc.

The card will be accessible through an app or a website. It will be password-protected and would need the permission of the individual for a “one-time” limited-period access by doctors.

**National Health ID System:**

1. This system finds its roots in a 2018 NITI Aayog proposal to create a centralised mechanism to uniquely identify every participating user in the National Health Stack.

2. It will be a repository of all health-related information of a person.

3. According to the National Health Authority (NHA), every patient who wishes to have their health records available digitally must start by creating a Health ID.

4. Each Health ID will be linked to a health data consent manager — such as National Digital Health Mission (NDHM).

5. The Health ID is created by using a person’s basic details and mobile number or Aadhaar number.

6. This will make it unique to the person, who will have the option to link all of their health records to this ID.

**Access to data:**

The data will be automatically stored in a government cloud-based access system.

However, officials have said that access to medical records will be restricted to individuals and even the government will not have access to this data.

Ownership of the data shall lie only with the person, the Centre seems to suggest.

**Pilot project:**

In its first phase, the mission will begin in Union territories such as Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep, Ladakh and Puducherry.
COVID-19 has given us **great grief and trauma**. But it also **presents an opportunity to reset our outlook**, whether in healthcare or climate change.

One hopes that society awakens to this opportunity and we see an emergence of a system that is based on a **relationship of trust and responsibility** between patients and healthcare providers. That may be the only silver lining of the current situation.

**Concerns that need to addressed in implementation of NDHM:**

1. The NDHM still does not recognize ‘Health’ as a justiciable right. There should be a push draft at making health a right, as prescribed in the draft National Health Policy, 2015.

2. Digitalisation is welcome but is **no substitute for inadequate human resources and infrastructure in the health sector**.

3. One of the **biggest concerns** is regarding **data security and privacy of patients**. It must be ensured that the health records of the patients remain entirely confidential and secure.

4. To enable **seamless data exchange**, all users (pharmacists, laboratories, radiology clinics, insurers and hospitals) must be incentivised to adopt a standard language of communication.

**Conclusion:**

The architecture seeks to **protect patients** by the rather elegant use of the consent manager framework that has already been successfully **used by the Universal Payment Interface**.

These **tectonic shifts** won’t all happen on August 15. Or on January 26. Or within the cyclical tenure of bureaucrats or politicians.

And they won’t occur in the absence of the long overdue overhaul of healthcare delivery in India. But when they do, they will advance medicine and health for all.

Health information can travel between entities only with **requisite permission** and with **permanent record of the transaction**.

The potential here for changing **how health data are utilised** is unlimited. Success is likely to be measured by an acceleration in cashless transactions, better book-keeping, decreased friction in payments — all of which are laudable.

For patients and providers, however, success will look different. The portability of clinically-relevant data across private-public divides and states will cut costs and save time, the ability to monitor compliance, say, with responsible use of antibiotics, can profoundly alter practice and **improve the quality of care**, and the ability to **conduct timely institution-based syndromic surveillance** may alter the course of an epidemic, and of a nation.
8. Seal of justice

Context:
The Supreme Court of India in a recent judgment has again backed the fact that the daughters cannot be deprived of their right of equality conferred upon them by Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956.

The judgment recognizes that in a coparcenary property, the daughters have an equal right.

Supreme Court judgment on daughters’ right to property:
The Supreme Court also stated that since the right in coparcenary is by birth, it is not necessary that father coparcener should be living as on 9.9.2005.

The Supreme Court has placed Hindu women’s right to inherit ancestral property beyond the pale of ambiguity, a welcome ruling and a logical culmination of a long process to weed Indian laws of patriarchal prejudice.

It was an exercise that was speeded up soon after Independence, with the framers of the Constitution inscribing the promise of gender equality in the founding-document of the nation.
They walked the talk by pushing through the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, in the teeth of fierce opposition from conservative Hindu opinion.

What is coparcenary?

A joint Hindu family means all people lineally descending from a common ancestor, including wives and unmarried daughters.

But a **Hindu coparcenary is a much narrower group**. It consists of the ‘propositus’ (the person from whom a line of descent is traced) and three of his descendants.

Coparcenary property is the one which is **inherited by a Hindu man** from his father, grandfather, or great grandfather.

The property in coparcenary is held as joint owners, and only a coparcener has a right to demand a partition of this property.

Before 2005, the coparceners included only sons, grandsons, and great grandsons who are holders of a joint property.

But the 2005 amendment to Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act essentially gave **equal rights to daughters in ancestral property**.

So the amendment allowed daughters to be recognised as coparceners by birth in the family, similar to sons.

174th Law Commission report suggestions to change property laws:

1. **In 2000, the 174th Law Commission** noted that “the framing of all property laws have been exclusively for the benefit of man” even though the right to property is “important for the freedom and development of a human being”.

2. It pushed for a change in law that barred women from being considered co-parceners (or joint legal heirs) of a Hindu undivided joint family.

3. **Only male descendants of an ancestor, their mothers, wives and unmarried daughters were given that right.**

4. The commission’s report was followed through in Parliament **by the 2005 amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956** that said that a woman could be a co-parcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”.

5. Nevertheless, the gap between precept and practice was manifest in several cases and in several court judgments, when the interpretations of whether the amendment could apply retrospectively or depended upon the father’s being alive in 2005 threw up conflicting answers.

6. The three-judge bench of the SC has put an **end to this confusion by emphasising again that it is a right “by birth” of a Hindu woman to become a joint heir to ancestral property.**

7. In doing so, the court has interpreted the law capaciously, **keeping in mind the progressive intent behind the 2005 amendment.**

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:

1. The **174th Law Commission Report** had recommended the **reform in Hindu succession law.**
2. Before the 2005 amendment, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu had made this change in the law and Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family System in 1975.

3. It gave Hindu women the right to be coparceners or joint legal heirs in the same way a male heir does.

4. The amended act made a daughter of a coparcener also a coparcener by birth “in her own right in the same manner as the son”.

5. The law also gave the daughter the same rights and liabilities “in the coparcenary property as she would have had if she had been a son”.

6. It applies to ancestral property and to intestate succession in personal property where succession happens as per law and not through a will.

**Government’s stand:**

The Solicitor General of India has argued in favour of an expansive reading of the law to allow equal rights for women.

He criticised the Mitakshara coparcenary 1956 law because it contributed to discrimination on the ground of gender and was also oppressive and negated the fundamental right of equality (Articles 14 to 18) guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

**Conclusion:**

Gender justice is far from being reality in India, with several other inequalities of caste, religion and class reinforcing the secondary status of women.

Over the years, the expansion of educational and other opportunities has bent social attitudes towards gender justice, making what seemed abhorrently subversive once (the right to divorce, the end of polygamy) a matter of reasonable progress now.

But the judgment is in sync with a larger churn in Indian life, that has seen women extract similar concessions from families and religions, that involves citizens and communities using constitutional promises to push institutions towards change.

This ruling is a seal on a substantive change in the Hindu undivided family.

9. **Historic ratification: On universal ratification of a labour standard**
Context: universal ratification of Convention 182:

ILO Director General celebrates the universal ratification of ILO Convention No. 182, the first ILO Convention in history to achieve universal ratification.

As of this day, children benefit from critical legal protection from the worst forms of child labour in every ILO member State.

Since its adoption in 1999, ratification of this Convention and ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age has ushered in targeted programmes to tackle child labour through education, social protection, and decent work for adults and youth of working age, resulting in a decline in child labour of almost 100 million since 2000.

The welcome decision by the Kingdom of Tonga to outlaw the worst forms of child labour is the first time in the International Labour Organization (ILO)’s 101-year history that a labour standard has been universally ratified.

Indian Constitution provisions:

**Article 21(A) and Article 45** – The child has the right to Education i.e. the state shall provide compulsory and free education to the children of the age six to 14 years.

**Article 24** – There is a provision under which a child below the age of 14 years cannot be employed in any mine, factory or hazardous workplace.

**Article 39(f)** – The child’s youth and childhood are to be protected against moral and material abandonment and exploitation.

ILO conventions of 182:

1. The historic first universal ratification of a global labour standard may be an occasion for celebration; it is nonetheless a moment for sober reflection.
2. The two instruments on child labour are among the eight core ILO Conventions regarded as embodying the spirit of the 1998 declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work.
3. Convention 182, which was adopted in the 1999 annual international labour conference, prohibits the sexual exploitation of children, trafficking, deployment in armed conflict and other conditions that compromise their overall well-being.

4. The Convention complements the ILO’s efforts under the 1973 Minimum Age Convention to prevent the employment of children below a lower age threshold.

5. Under the influence of both these ILO standards, millions of young boys and girls have been rescued from hazardous conditions of work.

6. Concomitantly, these have resulted in significant increases in enrolments in primary education. The landmark ratification, however, does not detract from the enormity of the challenge that remains.

7. An estimated 152 million are trapped in child labour and 72 million of them are engaged in hazardous work.

8. If anything, current efforts would have to be stepped up significantly to achieve the ambitious goal of total abolition of the scourge of child labour by 2025.

9. But the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening a reversal of recent gains, with widespread job losses, deterioration in conditions of work, decline in household incomes and temporary school closures.

IPEC+ Flagship Programme:

The IPEC+ Flagship Programme brings together two leading ILO technical cooperation programmes: The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and the Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP/FL) – to establish a major new force in the fight against child labour, forced labour and human trafficking.

It recognizes that these unacceptable forms of work deny workers their basic human rights at work and that, while their overlap concerns 4.5 million children trapped in contemporary forms of slavery, they share root causes of poor governance, discrimination and social exclusion, family and community poverty and lack of access to decent work and to the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The objective of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme – in line with target 8.7 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, is to provide ILO leadership in global efforts to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2025 and all forms of contemporary slavery and human trafficking by 2030.

It also aims to ensure that all people are protected from and can protect themselves against these gross human rights violations.

IPEC+ Flagship Programme and COVID-19:

COVID-19 has plunged the world into a crisis of unprecedented scope and scale. The harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally.

They are expected to be most damaging for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, such as children in child labour and victims of forced labour and human trafficking, particularly women and girls.

These vulnerable groups are more affected by income shocks due to the lack of access to social protection, including health insurance and unemployment benefits.
IPEC+ Flagship Programme has developed plans to mitigate the risks and to repurpose its strategy and is seeking to allocate additional funding to support efforts to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on child labour and forced labour.

**The recently launched brief COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour:**

The response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme presents 6 key interventions aimed to reach around 1 million vulnerable children, communities and families in an additional 10 countries:

1. Leveraging our field presence
2. Mobilizing our global and regional networks
3. Producing knowledge and data
4. Investing in gender-responsive monitoring and compliance solutions
5. Building resilience through social dialogue
6. Repurposing and innovating our operations

Yet ILO warns that the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse years of progress. As we look towards 2021, the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, ILO emphasises that now is the time to deliver on the promise of Convention 182 and put an end to child labour in all its forms.

**Conclusion:**

In order to contribute to this goal of elimination of Child labour, the ILO launched Alliance 8.7, a global partnership designed to align the efforts of those working towards the achievement of SDG Target 8.7.

**Goal 8** aims to Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Instruments relating to the freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation are among the others.

These conventions provide the necessary framework to counteract the predominance of informality in the conditions of work and ought to be a priority for governments.

Though belated, India has signalled its legal commitment to the elimination of child labour with its 2017 ratification of Convention 182 and the instrument prescribing the minimum age of work for children.

As the world prepares to designate 2021 as the year to abolish child labour, governments must seize the moment to instil hope in the future generations.

10. **Cartographic challenge: On Pakistan’s new map**
Context: Pakistan’s new map an expression of “Political absurdity”:

Pakistan has unveiled a new political map incorporating Jammu and Kashmir and parts of Gujarat as its territories.

We are witnessing a revival of cartographic assertiveness in South Asia. Coming on eve of the anniversary of repealing of article 370 by Indian parliament would not be lost on anyone.

The Ministry of External Affairs has termed Pakistan’s announcement of a new political map, which asserts its claims on Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek, and lays a new claim to Junagadh, as an exercise in “political absurdity”, and accused Pakistan of attempting a form of “territorial aggrandisement supported by cross-border terrorism”.

Pakistan’s claims on Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek:

1. Pakistan’s decision to issue the map, a tit-for-tat manoeuvre in return for India’s decision to reorganise Jammu and Kashmir a year ago, appears to reset several agreements with India that have been concretised over the past 70 years.

2. The current step is similar to all actions of Pakistan since independence that have shown a recklessness behaviour.

3. Beginning with raids by the tribals in J&K in 1948 to the occupation of Kargil heights half a century later, its actions have been erratic and have led to the loss of face for its armed forces.

4. Pakistan’s latest move to rock the boat is similarly an unthoughtful step with a potential for future conflicts and instability.

5. The map the Pakistan government unveiled lays claim to all of Jammu and Kashmir, thus far shown as disputed territory, draws a line demarcating Gilgit-Baltistan separately from the part of Kashmir under its control (Pakistan occupied Kashmir).

6. The new map leaves the claim line with Ladakh unclear. While each of these acts is outrageous for India, it should also be questioned in Islamabad.
7. Pakistan’s claim to all of Jammu and Kashmir, but not Ladakh, goes against its own commitment to adjudicate the future of all six parts of the erstwhile royal state of Jammu-Kashmir (Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit-Baltistan, PoK and Aksai Chin) with India.

8. The **claims to Siachen and Sir Creek**, that have been the subject of several discussions between India and Pakistan, are also a **regressive step**.

9. While both sides had reached an impasse on Siachen, the **Sir Creek agreement** had made **considerable progress**, and was reportedly even resolved, pending a political announcement in 2007.

10. Either way, both were without doubt disputed areas, and Pakistan’s unilateral claim over them is not helpful or conducive to future resolution.

11. Finally, the move on **Junagadh**, a former princely state whose accession to India was accepted by Pakistan, opens up a whole new dispute.

12. While **Junagadh** was in contention at the time of Partition, the issue was successfully resolved **after a referendum** was conducted there in February 1948, in which an overwhelming 95% of the state’s residents voted to stay with India.

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**Importance of Sir Creek:**

Sir Creek is a **96-km strip of water disputed** between India and Pakistan in the Rann of Kutch marshlands. Originally named Ban Ganga, Sir Creek is named after a British representative.

The Creek opens up in the Arabian Sea and roughly divides the Kutch region of Gujarat from the Sindh Province of Pakistan.

Apart from the **strategic location**, Sir Creek’s core **importance is fishing resources**. Sir Creek is considered to be among the largest fishing grounds in Asia.

Another vital reason for two countries locking horns over this creek is the possible **presence of great oil and gas concentration** under the sea, which are currently unexploited thanks to the impending deadlock on the issue.

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**Recently, new political maps by neighbouring countries:**

1. Just a month ago, Nepal’s parliament passed a bill claiming the **area of Kali, Lipulekh and Limpivadhura** as its territories.

2. India rejected that on the grounds of **historical agreements** and its de facto control over them.


4. This was done just ahead of the anniversary of the **abolition of Art 370 in Jammu and Kashmir**.

5. It does not alter the status quo, and only shows the frustration of the regime which came under pressure from the extremist groups after the abolition of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir by India last year.

6. Pakistan’s claim is **a violation of Shimla Agreement** which clearly stipulated- “In Jammu and Kashmir, the line of control resulting from the cease-fire of December 17, 1971, shall be **respected by both sides without prejudice**” to the recognized position of either side.
7. Neither side shall seek to alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations.

8. Both sides further undertake to refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this Line. Pakistan is trying to alter the situation on paper (map) as well as by force on a day to day basis.

Conclusion:

As New Delhi considers its next moves on this provocation, it should be prepared for Pakistan taking all the issues it has raised with its new map to the international stage.

Pakistan’s actions, while on completely bilateral matters, come in conjunction with map-related issues India faces today on two other fronts: with China at the Line of Actual Control on Ladakh, and with Nepal at Kalapani and Limpiyadhura (which Nepal’s government has also issued a new map about).

According to experts, it is surely no coincidence that all three countries objected to the map India had issued in November 2019, albeit for different reasons, and India must be well-prepared to deal with the three-pronged cartographic challenge it will face in the coming months.

11. China-Russia ties as a major determinant

Russia's cultural influence is still the strongest,

...while China’s influence is increasing and the American cultural impact remains low.

Introduction:

In June 2019, Chinese President Xi Jinping described Russian President Vladimir Putin, as “my best friend and colleague”.

At no time since the founding of the China in 1949 has such public bonhomie been seen between leaders of Russia and China.

It has sparked intense discussion on whether they are moving in the direction of a formal alliance, and what that could mean for the rest of the world.

The key triangle:
The **triangular relationship between America, China and Russia** has, for the most part, shaped global politics since 1950.

For the American Cold Warriors, the **road to victory** lay through Peking; today, the Kremlin seems to believe that the **road to revival of Russian power and prestige** similarly runs through it.

India is not a part of this triangle; yet they represent our three most consequential relationships.

Hence, a proper appraisal of the Sino-Russian relationship will be critical to our foreign policy calculus.

Second, the disintegration of the Soviet Union essentially negated the Russian threat in Chinese eyes. Both these trends will likely continue despite the recent tensions in Sino-U.S. relations.

**Columns of the partnership:**

The **three pillars** on which the Sino-Russian partnership currently rests are a **peaceful boundary**, expanding trade and a shared distrust of American intentions.

Western sanctions have tended to push the Russians closer to China.

Falling oil prices and fears of new sanctions on Russian gas supplies (Nord Stream 2) are demolishing the core of Russian exports to Europe, thus compelling them to depend to an even greater degree on the Chinese.

Ironically, even though it is in neither Russia’s nor the European Union’s interest to hasten a bi-polar world, western actions to punish Russia have served to strengthen China’s position in the strategic triangle.

**India and Russia ties:**

In recent, there is a case for **India to re-calculate its relationship with Russia**.

The **politically reliable, trustworthy defence supplier** with shared misgivings about the China, that was the Soviet Union of yore, has long been replaced by a politically agnostic, commercially motivated Russia that no longer shares our concerns about China.

This might be valid if China is the principal factor in our relations with Russia, but that is not the case.

It never was even in the 1960s and the 1970s. A **strategic partnership with Russia based on the absence of fundamental conflicts of interest and a shared belief** that some form of multipolarity is better than any sort of Sino-U.S. condominium, is important for India, and this relationship deserves more attention from both sides.

**China-Russia Trade:**

1. After the western sanctions, China-Russia trade has more than doubled to $108 billion.
2. Russia’s central bank has **increased its Chinese currency reserves** from less than 1% to over 13%.
3. China has surpassed Germany as the principal supplier of industrial plant and technology.
4. Russia presently enjoys a **nominal trade surplus** but China has a clear advantage going forward.
5. Most of its exports to Russia are now at a **higher technology level** while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.
6. The Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.
7. The investment relationship is done where it suits China’s core energy interests, such as the Power of Siberia (a $400 billion deal over 30 years to supply gas to China from Russian far east along 1,800 miles long pipeline).

**Advantage China in trade:**

1. As for the economic pillar, while Russia presently enjoys a nominal trade surplus, going beyond gross trade to value-added trade, China has a clear advantage going forward.

2. Most of its exports to Russia are now at a higher technology level while the share of labour-intensive goods has declined.

3. At the other end of the spectrum, Russian exports have continued to focus on raw materials, especially oil and gas.

4. Despite Chinese promises, the investment relationship remains subdued except where it has suited China’s core energy interests, such as the $400 billion deal over 30 years to supply gas to China along the 1,800 miles long pipeline known as the **Power of Siberia.**

5. Russia remains wary about allowing any dominating role for China in oil and gas. In fact, over the long term, their economic interests are divergent.

6. Russia presumably thinks to control China through its energy dependency, a situation that the Chinese will not accept; and

7. China feels that it can integrate Russia into its economy by re-directing Russian oil and gas eastwards but, while Russia needs financing, it is unlikely to give up its economic independence or sovereignty.

**China’s rise, Russia’s unease:**

The growing power-gap is threatening to further reduce Russian influence in their ‘near-abroad’ and to confine Russia to the periphery of global power.

1. Russia still regards itself as a world power and hopes to be at the centre of a Eurasian arrangement that stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

2. It considers U.S.-led hegemony as the primary threat to this vision, and this leads them on to make common cause with China.

3. This does not make Russian concerns about China disappear.

4. Russia is concerned about growing asymmetry and China’s pre-eminence even in Central Asia and Arctic regions, and Chinese migration in the Russian Far East.

5. Russia is in real danger of permanently becoming the ‘junior partner’.

6. The policymakers in Russia must be concerned about the possibility of China becoming a threat to Russia’s territorial integrity.

**Conclusion:**

In the words of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Moscow on September 20, 1982, “the garden of friendship like all gardens must be consistently tended”.
Some form of **multi-polarity** is better than completely cutting off diplomatic channels.

The future course of India’s foreign policy will largely depend on the upcoming regime in the U.S. and the level of engagement of China and Russia.

The **new reality of Sino-Russian relations** is thus one where substantial expansion of bilateral cooperation is accompanied by **growing asymmetry and China’s pre-eminence**, including in Russian ‘backyards’ such as Central Asia and the Arctic regions.

12. **Limited peace: On UAE-Israel peace agreement**

![Map of the Middle East and North Africa](image)

**Context:**

**Israel and the United Arab Emirates** have announced an agreement that will lead to a **full normalisation of diplomatic relations** between the two states, a move that reshapes the order of West Asia politics from the Palestinian issue to Iran.

The **peace agreement** reached between **Israel and the United Arab Emirates** has formalised the thaw in Arab-Israeli relations that has been under way for a few years. As part of the deal announced by U.S.

President Trump, the UAE would recognise the state of Israel and establish **formal diplomatic relations**, while Israel would halt its controversial plan to annex swathes of the Palestinian West Bank.

The agreement will be known as the **Abraham Accords**.

**Overview of the agreement:**

**Trilateral agreement:** The agreement was the product of lengthy discussions **between Israel, the UAE and the US** that accelerated recently.

Under the accord, Israel has agreed to suspend annexing areas of the occupied West Bank as it had been planning to do.
It also firms up opposition to regional power Iran, which the UAE, Israel and the US view as the main threat in the region.

**Peace agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates:**

1. The **UAE has become the first Gulf Arab state** to do so and **only the third Arab nation** to have active diplomatic ties with Israel.

2. Egypt made a peace deal with Israel in 1979, followed by Jordan in 1994.

3. Under the deal, Israel would suspend its plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank.

4. The **West Bank is sandwiched between Israel and Jordan**. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine.

5. Israel took control of it in the Six-day **Arab-Israeli war, 1967** and has over the years established settlements there.

6. A joint statement from the USA, the UAE and Israel has been issued which says that delegations would meet in the coming weeks to sign deals on direct flights, security, telecommunications, energy, tourism and health care.

7. Both nations will also partner **on fighting the Covid-19 pandemic together**.

8. It remains unclear what prompted Israel and the UAE to make the announcement now.

9. In June 2020, the UAE’s ambassador to the USA warned that Israel’s plan to annex the Jordan Valley and other parts of the occupied West Bank would upend Israel’s efforts to improve ties with Arab nations.

It is a **landmark agreement** given that the UAE is only the third Arab country and the first in the Gulf recognising Israel.

It could pave the way for the region’s Sunni Arab kingdoms and the Jewish-majority Israel **enhancing regional cooperation** against their common foe, Shia Iran.

Israel has said it would focus on “expanding ties with other countries in the Arab and Muslim world”, while the U.S. has expressed hope that more Arab countries would follow the UAE’s lead — Arab-Israeli relations have largely been conflict-ridden ever since the state of Israel was declared in 1948.

The U.S. had arranged several meetings between Israeli and Emirati officials last year, which probably laid the foundations for the agreement.

**Why has UAE signed a peace deal with Israel?**

While the deal has the potential to change Arab-Israeli relations for good, it also shows how the Arab countries are gradually **decoupling themselves** from the Palestine question.

The **UAE offered full diplomatic recognition** in return for Israel’s suspension of a planned annexation, not for any relaxation of the actual occupation.
As Prime Minister Netanyahu said, Israel made peace with an Arab country without “our returning to the 1967 borders”.

**The Arab Peace Initiative**, a Saudi Arabia initiative endorsed by the Arab League, offered recognition to Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Ironically, the UAE’s peace agreement comes close on the heels of the Trump administration’s back-to-back decisions to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and its sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights.

Clearly, the UAE has moved away from the Arab initiative. The question now is whether the Emiratis would be able to press the Jewish state to relax its inhuman and illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and start talks between the occupier and the occupied.

If it cannot, the UAE-Israel deal would be of little significance for the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership, on its part, should understand the emerging reality in West Asia — the Arab-Israel conflict is coming to a close, but the Palestine-Israel conflict is to continue without any respite.

**India hails UAE-Israel pact, reiterates Palestine cause:**

India has consistently supported peace, stability and development in West Asia, which is our extended neighbourhood.

In that context, India welcome the full normalization of ties between UAE and Israel.

New Delhi will also need to watch ties with Iran, which has slammed the agreement and will see Arab-Israeli tie-ups as a direct threat to its security.

The deal opens up new opportunities for India to play a much larger role in the regional security and stability in the Gulf, where New Delhi enjoys special relations with both Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.

This is a region where India has deep stakes in terms of energy supplies and expatriate populations. India should use this unexpected opportunity to give itself a bigger role in a region which is its strategic backyard.

1. The first step should be to ramp up defence and security relations with UAE.
2. Israel is already a very close defence partner. But India should restart joint exercises with UAE, and even Saudi Arabia.
3. While some work has already happened, India should leverage its economy for a bigger opening in this region.
4. Importantly, India can use its good offices to ensure that any future deal on a regional security framework gives adequate space to Iran, which may be weak
5. but not so weak that it cannot be a hugely disruptive power if it so chooses. A balance between Shia and Sunni, between Persian and Arab, is key to any sustainable peace.
6. In recent years, China has indicated its willingness to play a larger role in this region, and is close to both UAE and Israel and, increasingly, Saudi Arabia.

**Major diplomatic victory for USA:**

The timing of the agreement is also significant. It gives a major diplomatic victory for President Trump a few months before election.
Mr. Trump’s Iran policy failed to clinch any result. His outreach to North Korea is still inconclusive.
The U.S. is withdrawing from Afghanistan at a time when the Taliban is on surge.
The U.S.’s ties with China have hit rock bottom. President Trump wanted a diplomatic victory, and his closest allies in West Asia, of course driven by regional factors, have given him one.
If more Arab countries open ties with Israel in the coming months, President Trump could claim a major diplomatic breakthrough in the Arab-Israel relations, which had seen at least four major wars in the past.

Conclusion:
India should make its moves before this market and this extended neighbourhood come under the Chinese sphere of influence.
The deal marks a historic day and a significant step forward for peace in the Middle East.
Opening direct ties between two of the Middle East’s most dynamic societies and advanced economies will transform the region by spurring economic growth, enhancing technological innovation and forging closer people-to-people relations.

13. RIC, a triangle that is still important

Context:
In recent, India attended a (virtual) meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China (RIC).
Amid the tensions on the Line of Actual Control, the dominant calls were for a more decisive westward shift in India’s foreign policy. A RIC meeting seemed incongruous in this setting.

About RIC:
RIC is a strategic grouping that first took shape in the late 1990s under the leadership of Yevgeny Primakov, a Russian politician as “a counterbalance to the Western alliance.”
The group was founded on the basis of ending its subservient foreign policy guided by the USA and renewing old ties with India and fostering the newly discovered friendship with China.
Together, the **RIC countries occupy over 19% of the global landmass and contribute to over 33% of global GDP.**

The RIC is a **significant multilateral grouping**, because it brings together the three largest Eurasian countries which are also incidentally geographically contiguous. RIC, hence provides a worthwhile platform to discuss issues like West Asia, Afghanistan, climate change, terrorism, regional connectivity, tensions on Korean Peninsula, etc.

**The initial years of transition to multi-polar world:**

1. When the RIC dialogue commenced in the early 2000s, the three countries were positioning themselves for a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order.

2. It was not an anti-U.S. construct; all three countries considered their relationship with the United States an essential prop to their global ambitions.

3. The RIC shared some non-West (as distinct from anti-West) perspectives on the global order, such as an emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity, impatience with homilies on social policies and opposition to regime change from abroad.

4. Their support for **democratisation of the global economic and financial architecture** moved to the agenda of BRIC (with the addition of Brazil).

5. The initial years of the RIC dialogue coincided with an upswing in India’s relations with Russia and China.

6. The advent of President Vladimir Putin reinforced the political, defence and energy pillars of the **India-Russia strategic partnership**.

7. With China, the 2003 decision to bring a political approach to the boundary dispute and to develop other cooperation, encouraged a multi-sectoral surge in relations.

8. An agreement in 2005, identifying political parameters applicable in an eventual border settlement, implicitly recognised India’s interests in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Strategic Subtext to India-U.S. and Russia-China ties:**

1. India’s relations with the U.S. surged, encompassing trade and investment, a landmark civil nuclear deal and a burgeoning defence relationship that met **India’s objective of diversifying military acquisitions** away from a near-total dependence on Russia.

2. There was a strategic sub-text: as China was rapidly emerging as a challenger to its global pre-eminence, the U.S. saw value in partnering with a democratic India in Asia.

3. Transformations in the external environment impacted on these political equations.

4. Among other irritants, China went back on the 2005 agreement, launched the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**, worked to undermine India’s influence in its neighbourhood and expanded its military and economic presence in the Indian Ocean.

5. The texture of the relationship with Russia also changed, as **India-U.S. collaboration widened in defence and the Indo-Pacific.**
6. As U.S.-Russia relations imploded in 2014 (after the annexation/accession of Crimea), Russia’s pushback against the U.S. included cultivating the Taliban in Afghanistan and enlisting Pakistan’s support for it.

7. The **western campaign to isolate Russia** drove it into a much closer embrace of China particularly in defence cooperation than their history of strategic rivalry should have permitted.

**Russia-India-China Grouping Significance:**

1. The Russia-India-China engagement still has significance. India is in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is **driven by Russia and China** and includes four Central Asian countries.

2. **Central Asia is strategically located**, bordering our turbulent neighbourhood. A sliver of land separates Tajikistan from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

3. Pakistan’s membership of SCO and the potential admission of Iran and Afghanistan (as member states) heighten the **significance of the SCO for India**.

4. **Growing Chinese influence** is testing the informal Russia-China understanding that Russia handles the politico-security issues in the region and China extends economic support.

5. It is important for India to shape the Russia-China dynamics in this region, to the extent possible. The Central Asian countries have signalled they would welcome such a dilution of the Russia-China duopoly.

6. The **ongoing India-Iran-Russia project** for a sea/road/rail link from western India through Iran to Afghanistan and Central Asia, is an important initiative for achieving an **effective Indian presence in Central Asia, alongside Russia and China**.

7. The bilateral arms of the India-Russia-China triangle will also remain important. The **defence and energy pillars** of India’s partnership with Russia remain strong.

8. **Access to Russia’s abundant natural resources** can enhance our materials security the importance of which has been highlighted by COVID-19. With China too, while the recent developments should accelerate our efforts to bridge the bilateral asymmetries, disengagement is not an option.

9. We have to **work bilaterally and multilaterally on a range of issues**, even while firmly protecting our interests on the border, in technology and the economy.

**The Indo-Pacific issue: perspectives of various countries:**

The elephant in the RIC room is the **Indo-Pacific**.

For India, it is a **geographic space of economic and security importance**, in which a cooperative order should prevent the dominance of any external power.

China sees our Indo-Pacific initiatives as part of a **U.S.-led policy of containing China**.

Russia’s Foreign Ministry sees the Indo-Pacific as an **American ploy to draw India and Japan into a military alliance against China and Russia**.

India’s focus on economic links with the Russian Far East and activation of a **Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor** may help persuade Russia that its interests in the Pacific are compatible with our interest...
in diluting Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific; this also accords with President Putin’s concept of a Greater Eurasia.

**Autonomy of action should be part of India’s Policy towards China:**

The current India-China stand-off has intensified calls for India to fast-track partnership with the U.S. This is an unexceptionable objective, but is not a silver bullet.

**National security cannot be fully outsourced,** India’s quest for autonomy of action is based on its geographical realities, historical legacies and global ambitions not a residual Cold War mindset.

**Conclusion:**

India is committed to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the border areas and RIC would give the platform for resolution of differences (along the Indo-China Border) through dialogue.

As noted, **RIC dynamics are sensitive to the configuration of the U.S.-Russia-China triangle.**

This configuration changed in 2008 (the global economic crisis) and again in 2014 (Crimea’s accession to Russia).

COVID-19 could trigger another change, which could be modulated by the outcome of the U.S. Presidential elections.

The RIC forms the core of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS as greater cooperation between China, India and Russia would lead to strengthening of both SCO and BRICS.
Introduction:
Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Urjit Patel in his new book *Overdraft Saving the Indian Saver*, talks about a trilemma facing the Indian central bank and the government, when it comes to the public sector banking system in India.

What is the trilemma about?
The sovereign (government) and the regulator (RBI) face a trilemma: It is clear that it is not possible to:

(i) Have dominance of government banks (public sector banks) in the banking sector;
(ii) Retain independent regulation; and
(iii) Adhere to public debt-gross domestic product (GDP) targets.

The government along with RBI cannot hope to **achieve all three points at the same time.**

Only two out of the three can be achieved:

- Predominant public sector and independent regulation by RBI.
- Predominant public sector and adherence to debt to GDP targets.

Let’s say the government wants the public sector banks (PSBs) to dominate the banking system and at the same time ensure that the **public debt doesn’t go up.**

What will happen in such a circumstance?
In this scenario, the Reserve Bank will have to **compromise on independent regulation.**

To dominate the banking system, PSBs will have to **increase lending at a fast pace.**

This will lead to **accumulation of bad loans** or loans that haven’t been repaid for 90 days or more.

![Losing proportion graph](image-url)
Given that the recoveries of bad loans are minimal, the government, as the owner, will have to invest more money into the PSBs to keep them going.

If the government puts more money into the PSBs, its **expenditure will go up**. It will have to borrow more money and the **public debt to GDP ratio will substantially rise**.

**How can public debt to GDP ratio be saved from rising?**

The central bank will have to **dilute some regulations** to help the PSBs in not recognizing bad loans.

In such a case, the government need not invest in the PSBs immediately. PSBs will have a **greater market share** and the public debt to GDP ratio will not rise right away. However, the central bank will have to dilute banking regulations.

**What is the issue with RBI diluting norms?**

When RBI dilutes regulations, banks end up kicking the bad loans can down the road.

This **postponement leads to a bigger problem**, which hits the banks, not immediately, but a few years later.

This is precisely how PSBs accumulated **peak bad loans of ₹8.96 trillion**, as of March 2018.

The government then has to **recapitalize the banks** in the years to come. In the process, it pushes the **public debt to GDP ratio up**. This is one situation that the government has been trying hard to avoid.

**Arguments for reducing government dominance on Public Sector Banks (PSBs):**

The basic argument that has been making has **its roots in the discourse on banking reform** and **reducing dominant state ownership and control** over the banks.

There is an assumption that state-owned banks have a sovereign guarantee and, therefore, safe from the depositors’ perspective. But **sovereign ownership also creates a sense of performance complacence**.

The punishment by the stock market for non-performance is blunt but it does not ostensibly harm the dominant shareholder.

It is the **minority shareholder who suffers at the first instance** and then (if the insulation of the sovereign is removed) the saver.

However, if there is a large overlap between savers and tax payers then they are paying the price for saving themselves at one end even as the cost of finance for the economy does not go down.

The cost of non-performing assets and administrative overheads ultimately has to be **recovered from the profits** — a reason that indicates that **interest rate cuts do not get transmitted**.

**Conclusion: Eventual way out for RBI and government:**

The decline in the share of government banks in the banking sector **should not be resisted**.

Current trends broadly suggest that the banking sector is **increasingly privatized**, by stealth, much like the telecom sector.

In the last decade, the share of PSBs in overall lending has dropped sharply from 75.1% to 57.5% at present.
As PSBs keep losing share, they will cause fewer headaches for the government and the central bank in the decades to come.

While India does face this trilemma as proposed by the former governor, unchecked privatization may not be the solution.

A **balanced approach is needed** where the resolution process of financial failure of private banks needs to be evolved. These norms must address how to secure depositor interests.

2. **India does need a Fiscal Council**

   ![Image](image)

   **Introduction:**

   The fiscal situation in India has been under **severe stress** even before COVID-19 and the **novel coronavirus pandemic** has only worsened it.

   The **fiscal deficit of the Centre in 2019-20** as estimated by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) was **4.6%**, 0.8 percentage point higher than the revised estimate.

   For the current year, even without any additional fiscal stimulus, the **deficit is estimated at about 7% of GDP** as against 3.5% estimated in the Budget due to a sharp decline in revenues.

   The **consolidated deficit** of the Union and States could be as **high as 12% of GDP** and the **overall debt could go up to 85%**.

   When off Budget liabilities are considered, the situation looks even more alarming.

   **Need for transparency: report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in 2018:**

   1. There are **questions of comprehensiveness, transparency and accountability in the Budgets.**

   2. The practice of repeated postponement of targets, timely non-settlement of bill payments and off Budget financing to show lower deficits has been common.

   3. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India in 2018 on the compliance of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act for 2016-17, **highlights various obfuscations done to keep the liabilities hidden.**
4. These include special banking arrangements for covering arrears of fertilizer subsidy, issuing short-term bonds, unsecured loans and borrowing from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) by the Food Corporation of India towards meeting food subsidy and its arrears.

5. Financing irrigation projects from the Long-Term Irrigation Fund (LTIF) created by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and financing of railway projects through borrowings from the Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) are just some examples.

**Various commission’s recommendations:**

In order to make the **Budgets comprehensive, transparent and accountable**, the **13th Finance Commission** recommended that a committee be appointed by the Ministry of Finance which should eventually **transform itself into a Fiscal Council** to “conduct an **annual independent public review of FRBM compliance**, including a review of the fiscal impact of policy decisions on the FRBM roadmap”.

The FRBM Review Committee too made a similar recommendation underlining the need for an independent review by the Finance Ministry appointing the Council.

Therefore, the 14th Finance Commission recommended the establishment of an independent **Fiscal Council** which should be appointed by and reporting to Parliament by inserting a new section in the FRBM Act.

**The mandate of Independent Fiscal Council:**

A **Fiscal Council** is an **independent fiscal institution (IFI)** with a mandate to promote stable and sustainable public finances.

A fiscal council is defined as, “…a publicly funded entity staffed by non-elected professionals mandated to provide nonpartisan oversight of fiscal performance and/or advice and guidance — from either a positive or normative perspective — on key aspects of fiscal policy”.

These institutions assist in calibrating sustainable fiscal policy by making an objective and scientific analysis.

1. First, an **unbiased report to Parliament** helps to raise the level of debate and brings in greater transparency and accountability.
2. Second, **costing of various policies and programmes** can help to promote transparency over the political cycle to discourage populist shifts in fiscal policy and improve accountability.
3. Third, **scientific estimates** of the cost of programmes and assessment of forecasts could help in raising public awareness about their fiscal implications and make people understand the nature of budgetary constraint.
4. Finally, the Council will work as a **conscience keeper in monitoring rule-based policies**, and in raising awareness and the level of debate within and outside Parliament.

**The important tasks of these independent fiscal institution (IFI)s:**

Independent analysis, review and monitoring and evaluating of government’s fiscal policies and programmes;

Developing or reviewing macroeconomic and/or budgetary projections;

Costing of budget and policy proposals and programmes; and presenting policy makers with alternative policy options.
Over the years, monitoring compliance with fiscal rules and costing policies and programmes have become major tasks of these councils.

The OECD (2013) has documented the important principles needed for successful fiscal councils under nine broad heads and these are:

- local ownership; independence and non-partisanship; mandate; resources; relationship with legislature; access to information; transparency; communication and external evaluation.

These principles are important, ensure autonomy, being unbiased, transparency, and effective and accountable Councils.

**Independent fiscal institution (IFI): Diverse role, more acceptance:**

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), there were 36 countries with independent fiscal institution (IFI)s in 2014 and more have been established since.

Although their common agenda has been to function as watchdogs, there is considerable diversity in their structure and functions.

**How effective have these institutions been?**

A study by the IMF, documents that the existence of independent fiscal institution (IFI)s is associated with stronger primary balances;

countries with IFIs tend to have more accurate macroeconomic and budgetary forecasts;

IFIIs are likely to raise public awareness and raise the level of public debate on fiscal policy.

**Case studies in Belgium, Chile and the United Kingdom show that IFIs have significantly contributed to improved fiscal performances:**

1. In Belgium, the government is legally required to adopt the macroeconomic forecasts of the Federal Planning Bureau and this has significantly helped to reduce bias in these estimates.
2. In Chile, the existence of two independent bodies on Trend GDP and Reference Copper Price has greatly helped to improve Budget forecasts.
3. In the U.K., the Office for Budget Responsibility has been important in restoring fiscal sustainability.
4. Cross-country evidence shows that fiscal councils exert a strong influence on fiscal performances, particularly when they have formal guarantees of independence.

**The final word: What do we do when the governments fail?**

It is here that we need systems and institutions to ensure checks and balances.

In that respect, a Fiscal Council is an important institution needed to complement the rule-based fiscal policy.

Of course, it is not a ‘silver bullet’; if there is no political will, the institution would be less effective, and **if there is political will, there is no need for such an institution.**
That is also true of the FRBM Act. While we cannot state that the FRBM Act has been an unqualified success, it has also not been an abject failure either.

The counterfactual will show that things would have been much worse without it, and it has helped to raise the awareness of government, legislators and the public at large.

Conclusion:
Similarly, the Fiscal Council will help in improving comprehensiveness, transparency and accountability. While the prevailing exceptional circumstance warrants loosening of purse strings, it is necessary that the government must return to a credible fiscal consolidation path once the crisis gets over.

3. Re-imagining and reinventing the Indian economy

Context:
The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the global economy and India is no different. The significant reduction in domestic demand caused by the nationwide lockdown has pushed the economy towards contraction in the first quarter of 2020-21, and the impact is likely to be felt in subsequent months as well.

In this regard, PM Shri Narendra Modi has taken decisive and commendable action to mitigate the impact of the virus outbreak, from both a health and an economic perspective.

Coronavirus stimulus package totalling ₹20 lakh crore:
The inability of nations to control the spread of the novel coronavirus and the lack of a confirmed cure for the disease have exacerbated people’s concerns.

Such a heightened sense of anxiety among people can cause tremendous upheavals in the functioning of societies.
Consequently, disruption of the normal social order will inevitably impact livelihoods and the larger economy.

On May 12, 2020, Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a mammoth coronavirus stimulus package totalling ₹20 lakh crore, which works out to about 10% of GDP, making it one of the most substantial relief plans in the world.

The revised stimulus package can help revive businesses, which are finding it difficult to operate without adequate availability of credit.

This is especially true for India’s 60,000-odd start-ups which are facing an acute liquidity crunch. The situation presents an opportunity to take bold action to promote investments, protect existing jobs and create new jobs.

**The strategy should address four major economic cylinders:**

a) **Big Business Houses** which are a major contributor to GDP and large employment generators.

b) **MSMEs** which are the lifeline of the country, generating wealth for the middle class.

c) **Start-ups** which bring innovation and transformation to our country’s economy.

d) Our Indian Brothers and Sisters living abroad, the NRIs and OCIs — they not only serve as unofficial ambassadors of India, but their heart beats for India and through their contacts, can bring huge investments into India.

**Suggestions:**

**Big Business Houses:**

1. Big business houses should be supported by the government to reopen their operations by way of **tax incentives or ease of procurement** of raw materials or other goods and services on credit as this will energise consumer demand and boost the functioning of vendor or ancillary industry in the MSME sector (which has huge potential for job creation).

2. The RBI should consider **Single One Time Window for restructuring business loans**, as required, by all banks.

There is a high probability that non-performing assets are likely to rise once the prevailing moratorium is lifted by RBI. The government and RBI also urgently need to assure banks, that their business decisions will not be questioned, to encourage credit flows.

3. The Centre can prepare a **five-year plan** on getting at least 60 per cent of those companies, desiring to move manufacturing out of China to India.

**For MSMEs:**

4. **Making India a global trading hub** – devise an incentive regime for companies setting up global trading operations from India.

5. The States should think of **establishing self-contained “industrial cities”** that earmark space for manufacturing, commercial, educational, residential and social infrastructure.
6. The **10 sectors** identified by the government fit into the Make in India campaign — electrical, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, automotive, mining, electronics, heavy engineering, renewable energy, food processing, chemicals and textiles. Japan, the U.S. and South Korea have already shown interest.

**For Start-ups:**

7. It should also **encourage sunrise sectors** as part of re-imagining Indian economy such as battery manufacturing (storage systems)/ solar panel manufacturing.

The government can also consider **giving impetus to “Deep Tech”-leveraged businesses** — blockchain, robotics, AI, machine learning, augmented reality, big data analytics, cyber security, etc.

8. India is amongst the **top start-up ecosystems globally**. Several of them are in pre-Angel or Angel-Funding stages and are under significant pressure to stay afloat in view of a lack of adequate liquidity.

Start-ups not only help drive innovation, but **also create jobs**, which will be very important going forward. The government needs to provide significant support to the start-up ecosystem.

9. The **auto industry** which **contributes significantly to GDP (nearly 9%)** deserves special treatment.

In addition to reducing GST rate, old vehicle scrap policy with tax incentives for creating a demand for new vehicles may be formulated. There is need to recognise Auto Sales Industry channel partners as MSMEs.

**10. Plug-and-Play model:** Maharashtra has created a turnkey ‘plug-and-play’ model for foreign investors. Similarly, other States must get their act together, be it on land acquisition, labour laws and providing social, environment and other infrastructure. Land should be made available for projects with all necessary pre-clearances — at Centre’s level (including Environmental), State’s and Municipal dispensations.

11. **Reforms in labour laws** do not only mean permission to hire and fire. Leeway should be given to strictly enforce discipline within the factory premises and demand higher productivity.

The moves by U.P., M.P. and Gujarat are welcome signals. The government should provide health insurance for migrant labourers as experimented by certain States.

**To bring huge investments into India:**

12. **Investments of NRIs and OCIs in India** should be treated on par with those of Resident Indians as regards interest and dividend repatriation and management control of Indian companies.

It may be mentioned that the Chinese government had called on rich overseas Chinese to invest in China with minimum government control, and massive investments followed. This has contributed to China’s prosperity and economic rise. A similar investment boom can take place in India through NRIs and OCIs who have the resources and expertise in manufacturing and technology.

Indian diaspora’s direct investment should be incentivised, perhaps in terms of a plug-and-play model to ensure that they do not end up spending lots of time in getting approvals to start a business.

**One-time repatriation of foreign earning:** The proposition is to reduce the current rate of 15% on a gross basis on dividends from foreign subsidiaries to 5%. This would lead to more influx of funds and thereby be expected to support local projects.

The government may also consider providing tax exemption on passive income like dividends, interest on bank deposits, income from mutual funds earned by NRIs from India, if such income is reinvested back in India. Also, capital gains should be taxed at 50% of applicable rates for next 3 years.
**Incentives for attracting new Investments:** We need to reconsider the approach to taxing interest, dividends and royalty paid to overseas investors.

For instance, though interest on several forms of debt qualifies for a concessional 5% tax rate, this is limited by fairly stringent thin capitalization norms.

The government could consider a 3 to 5-year moratorium on the applicability of thin capitalization norms to ensure that businesses are able to leverage on low cost borrowings from group entities abroad.

The government may consider relaxation of norms pertaining to issue of shares to resident entities owned by NRIs.

Further, relaxation should be provided for any funds received from NRIs, subject to production of simple documents such as Bank Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate (FIRC) / KYC documents.

13. An **Off-Shore investment centre** like Singapore can be opened in Mumbai where Indian domestic laws and taxation will not be applicable.

MNCs may route their investments into India through the Off-Shore Centre in Mumbai.

Foreign legal firms and banks along with domestic institutions can be invited to have a presence in the Off-Shore Centre.

**Conclusion:**

A lot more needs to be done, however, to resuscitate the country’s growth engine.

At this critical juncture, what **India needs is a two-pronged strategy** to successfully navigate the current crisis and recover strongly thereafter.

First, **minimise the damage** caused by the COVID and clear a path to recovery and second, **rebooting and re-imaging India** by promptly exploiting new opportunities unleashed by evolving business scenarios.

The three mantras should be **Bigger, Bolder and Faster execution of this strategy**.

**4. Rebuild India’s confidence, revive the economy**
These are extraordinarily difficult times for our nation and the world. People are gripped with the fear of disease and death from COVID-19.

This fear is ubiquitous and transcends geography, religion and class. The inability of nations to control the spread of the novel coronavirus and the lack of a confirmed cure for the disease have exacerbated people’s concerns.

Such a heightened sense of anxiety among people can cause tremendous upheavals in the functioning of societies.

Consequently, disruption of the normal social order will inevitably impact livelihoods and the larger economy.

An event with deep impact:

Economic contraction is not merely a GDP number for economists to analyse and debate. It means a reversal of many years of progress.

A significant number among the weaker sections of our society may slip back into poverty, a rare occurrence for a developing nation.

Many enterprises may shut down. An entire generation may be lost due to severe unemployment.

A contracting economy can adversely impact our ability to feed and educate our children owing to a shortage of financial resources. The deleterious impact of an economic contraction is long and deep, especially on the poor.

On NREGA and cash support:

There is extreme duress among India’s poor. At a time when agriculture activity has been robust, data show that just in the month of June, 62 million people demanded work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme at minimum wages.

This is thrice the usual number and 10 times more than the total number employed by the entire listed corporate sector.

It is evident that most of them are displaced non-agricultural workers, struggling to make ends meet.

Such is the scale and enormity of despair in our labour force. Fortuitously, the MGNREGA programme has proved to be a bedrock of support in such times but it is not enough.

A meaningful cash transfer can restore confidence in these families. Money in the hands of people can provide an immediate sense of security and confidence, which is the cornerstone to restoring economic normalcy.

India is perhaps the only large democracy that has not provided direct cash assistance of a significant amount during the COVID-19 crisis.

There seems to be a misplaced sense of apprehension that providing large cash assistance may deter people from returning to the workforce when needed and starve industry of labour. Such fears are stale and unfounded.

In the United States, as per reports, nearly three-quarters of unemployed workers received higher pay and benefits under their government’s COVID-19 assistance than from their employers.
But this has not prevented American industry from reopening. While it is inordinately late, it is still prudent to provide a significant sum as direct cash assistance to the poor which can inject confidence in them to weather this COVID-19 storm.

**Look at the financial system: Restore confidence in the Financial system:**

1. There is also a dire need to restore confidence in the financial system which acts as the vital lubricant for the economy.
2. COVID-19 assistance measures undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government such as interest rate reductions, credit guarantee and liquidity enhancement schemes are welcome steps, but they have largely failed since banks are not confident of lending.
3. Reviving the health of the banking sector is not merely about capital infusion or disinvestment of public sector banks.
4. Allowing institutions such as the RBI, public sector banks, bankruptcy boards, securities and insurance regulators to function freely and professionally is the foundational step to restoring confidence in the financial system.
5. It is critical to allow processes such as the insolvency process to function smoothly without intervention.
6. If there is confidence among people to spend and among bankers to lend, then the private sector will spontaneously derive the confidence to reopen and invest.
7. When firms feel confident of availability of capital and consumers, they do not need much else to kick-start production and investment.
8. Corporate tax cuts, such as the one announced last year, are misguided luxuries that will neither boost private investment nor are fiscally affordable.
9. Knee-jerk reaction such as protection of Indian industry through trade restrictions cannot catalyse economic activity immediately but instead, is a dangerous reversal of established industrial policy that has generated enormous economic gains over the last three decades.
10. A large direct cash assistance to people, improving capital adequacy of banks and providing credit guarantee schemes for corporates require significant financial resources.
11. Government finances are already stretched with a major shortfall in revenues.
12. New avenues for tax revenues are not feasible in the short term. Higher borrowing by the government is inevitable.
13. India cannot afford to be too fiscally restrained in these distressing times.

**Way out: Borrow from International Institutions or deficit monetisation by RBI:**

1. India must make full use of loan programmes of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
2. Our long track record as an impeccable borrower with no default, timely repayments and full transparency make us an ideal borrower for these institutions.
3. However, these will not suffice, and the government needs to borrow more.
4. Some have opined that India should hark back to the old ways of deficit monetisation by the RBI, also known as printing money.
5. This is understandable given the current unforeseen circumstances. But we must be cognisant of the unhealthy impulses that seemingly free money creates for governments.
6. **Deficit monetisation imposes high intangible and institutional costs**, as we have experienced in the past.
7. It is perhaps prudent to adopt deficit monetisation as the last resort when all other options are exhausted.
8. India is confronted with a dangerous trinity of military, health and economic threats.
9. India entered the COVID-19 crisis in a precarious position, with slowing growth, rising unemployment and a choked financial system. The epidemic has manifestly made it more painful.

**Conclusion:**

It is thus imperative to act with utmost urgency to nurse the economy back to good health.

The slowdown in economic activity is both a function of external factors such as the lockdown and behavioural changes of people and enterprises, driven by fear.

The foundation for reviving our economy is **to inject confidence back in the entire ecosystem**. People must feel confident about their lives and livelihoods.

Entrepreneurs must feel **confident of reopening and making investments**. Bankers must feel confident about providing capital. Multilateral organisations must feel confident enough to provide funding to India.

**Sovereign ratings agencies** must feel confident about India’s ability to fulfil its financial obligations and restore economic growth.

**Way Forward: Setting things right:**

It is important to enlarge one’s diagnosis of India’s economic woes from mere GDP numbers to the underlying sentiments of fear, uncertainty and insecurity prevalent in people, firms and institutions.

Restoring confidence in people through **direct cash assistance** and other welfare programmes can help them live their lives and spend.

Restoring confidence among bankers through **autonomy of institutions and processes** will help them lend.

Restoring confidence among businesses with **greater access to capital** will help them invest and create jobs.

Restoring confidence among international organisations by **re-establishing the credibility of our institutions** will help get funding assistance and objective sovereign ratings.

Without being lured into complacency over illusionary recovery of headline numbers, the path to **India’s sustained economic revival** is through the philosophical pursuits of **improving confidence and sentiments** of all in our society, using the **economic tools of fiscal and monetary policies**.
4. More than a vaccine, it is about vaccination

Context:
According to the World Health Organization, over 40 different candidate vaccines for COVID-19 are in development. These include an inactivated vaccine being developed in China (Sinovac) using purified COVID-19 virus killed with formaldehyde (a chemical).

There are multiple other vaccine candidates under development that use DNA, RNA, viral vector and subunit protein platforms.

During a pandemic, expecting vaccines the same year or the next, illustrates the power of technology, human hope, media hype — all at unprecedented frenzy.

How long does it take to develop a vaccine?

It can take years to develop vaccines first in laboratories to show proof-of-concept, then developing a manufacturing process to make stable and a highly pure product to be tested in animals and humans, and finally for the market.

The COVID-19 vaccine has been fast-tracked into humans without prior testing in animals.

WHO chief scientist warns against ‘vaccine nationalism’:

Chief Scientist at the World Health Organisation (WHO) raised the need to have a multilateral or global approach to vaccine deployment and distribution, rather than a more nationalistic approach.

The argument they are making is that the virus is everywhere in the world and it would be impossible for the world to go back to normal, and for the economy to recover if only pockets of people are protected.

Today, 10% of all infections have occurred in healthcare workers. It would be unfair not to protect them before everyone else gets a chance.

This was an ongoing dialogue happening globally, and getting a consensus was a challenge.
There are a large number of vaccine candidates in development. Some of them are big companies; multinationals have the resources and expertise to run their own trials, while smaller companies may not get the same opportunities. We want to provide a platform for vaccines to be tested

**India will have to deliver vaccine on a scale never seen before: Where India stands in vaccine delivery?**

Globally, innumerable vaccine trials are progressing; in India, two candidates have advanced considerably.

An inactivated coronavirus vaccine was created by Hyderabad’s Bharat Biotech. It is safe and immunogenic (stimulates anti-coronavirus antibody) in laboratory animals and humans, to be re-confirmed in a phase 2 trial; phase 3 will assess the vaccine’s safety and protective efficacy against COVID-19.

Pune’s Serum Institute of India (SII) is testing Oxford University-AstraZeneca’s vaccine using a Trojan horse approach, spiking chimpanzee adenovirus type 5 with coronavirus spike glycoprotein genes.

When injected, adenoviruses are detected and devoured by immune system cells patrolling for invading microbes. The smuggled genes force these cells to synthesise and spew out spike protein that is immunogenic.

This adenovirus is harmless in humans. The SII is ready to upscale production after regulatory clearances in the United Kingdom and India.

**Vaccine nationalism is ‘measles of the world’:**

Some wealthy nations made bilateral financial agreements with manufacturers in order to hog vaccines.

Such vaccine nationalism is ‘measles of the world’, borrowing the phrase from Einstein.

Global public good should not be hijacked by wealthy nations. Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, created COVAX—a funding facility to ensure up-scaling vaccine production and its access to low income countries as soon as regulatory approvals emerge.

COVAX will support the SII with funds to bring down selling-price to $3 per dose.

**With good news on supply side, what about the delivery side?**

India’s Universal Immunisation Programme is a vaccine-delivery platform for children and pregnant women, funded by the central government but implemented by State governments.

However, the COVID-19 vaccine is for all age groups, necessitating an innovative platform, prioritised on the basis of need.

**For India: Define policy for vaccine delivery should be in clarity:**

1. The first step is policy definition leading to a plan of action blueprint. The time to create them is now it costs nothing, but will save time when a vaccine becomes available.
2. Policy emerges from objective(s) for vaccine use in individuals and community.
3. Priority for individual need is to protect those at high risk of death (senior citizens and those with medical co-morbidities) and front-line workers who expose themselves to infection while providing health care.
4. Children may be vaccinated before schools reopen to protect them and prevent infection from being carried home.

5. Vaccine availability will be limited at first, when we must ensure that those on the priority list receive it.

6. Information should be made available to the individual and the health management system, for which computerised data are critical.

7. A **nationwide database with unique identification** details already exists, a valuable resource to identify those who need not be vaccinated.

8. Identifying past asymptomatic infections requires **systematic screening for IgG antibody**.

9. Antibody positives need not be vaccinated (no harm if vaccinated). All data should be saved permanently.

10. Area-wise estimates of the numbers who need vaccination on a priority basis are necessary. Now is the time for State governments to capture all such data.

**Getting a plan ready:**

We **need a vaccine-delivery platform** to fulfil all such needs.

1. A practical method is **vaccination camps**, supervised by a medical officer, staffed by health management and **local government**, and having the list of people who need vaccination.

2. Information should be **updated regularly**, deleting those who got infected recently.

3. Enumeration and registration of eligible persons can be started now. Vaccination by appointments will ensure that **vaccination is without overcrowding and with minimum waiting time**.

4. Post-injection, vaccinated subjects should wait for half-an-hour in case of immediate side effects; emergency drugs to tackle side effects should be readily available.

5. In India, **careful documentation of all side effects** in all individuals, senior citizens, those with co-morbidities, and children must supplement trial data on vaccine safety.

6. This ‘**post-marketing surveillance**’ must be built into the vaccine roll-out.

**A community’s need for vaccination is two-fold:**

All those who must **rebuild essential activities**, i.e. economic, educational, trade, transport, sociocultural and religious, must be protected.

A more ambitious aim is to **break the novel coronavirus transmission and eradicate the disease altogether**.

With India’s notable representation in decision-making bodies of the World Health Organization, India is uniquely positioned to play a crucial role in advocating global eradication of COVID-19.

**Conclusion:**

India would play a major role in **manufacturing and scaling of vaccines** apart from the research and development that was happening.
The **vaccine regulatory agency** should take a call on the special question of vaccine safety during pregnancy. One vaccine is an inactivated virus and the second is a live virus but non-infectious. Both may be assumed to be safe; yet safety in pregnancy must be ascertained in bridge studies that must be conducted as soon as possible.

### 8. Kerala rains: Idukki landslide

**Context:**

Landslides have caused **massive damage of life and property** during extremely heavy rain across India, most recently in Kerala.

The Kedarnath landslide in Uttarakhand in June 2013, caused by flash floods that resulted in over 5,000 deaths, was identified as the most tragic such disaster.

The landslip in Idukki, that has so far claimed 43 lives and rendered several homeless, follows from a continuing spell of heavy rains in Kerala.

Most districts have received **three or four times more rain than what is normal**. Last year too, neighbouring **Wayanad** saw multiple hamlets wiped out and the year before, the devastating floods in the State forced a debate on the need for new models of development.
**Regarding about Landslides:**

A **landslide** is defined as the movement of a mass of rock, debris, or earth down a slope.

Landslides are a type of "mass wasting (a geomorphic process)," which denotes any down-slope movement of soil and rock under the direct influence of gravity.

Several things can trigger landslides, including the slow weathering of rocks as well as soil erosion, earthquakes and volcanic activity.

As per Geological Survey of India, the **window of economic loss** due to landslides may reach between 1-2% of the gross national product in many developing countries.

**Landslides in Western Ghats region:**

Landslips, or landslides, in the Western Ghats have a history. Following the 2018 floods, data from the Geological Survey of India showed that Kerala had experienced 67 major landslide events and several minor ones from 1961-2013.

As part of a National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme, the agency mapped several States in the **Western Ghats, North-eastern States, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttarakhand** to assess how vulnerable their districts were.

Nearly 13,000 square kilometres were mapped until 2018 and 6,000 were to be covered in 2019-20 in Kerala, according to the programme website.

Nearly 13 of the State’s 14 districts were prone to landslides and what made Kerala particularly vulnerable was the high population density over 800 per square kilometre compared to other States that also faced high landslide risk.

**Landslides: Damage:**

1. Every year, landslides in the region kill dozens of people and cause widespread damage to several villages such that they have now become almost unfit for habitation.
2. They create blockades in the road network and river system, which in turn, cause floods.
3. The terraced farm fields have been destroyed that cannot be easily renovated or made productive again.
4. The road network remains closed for long periods causing indescribable hardship to the villagers who get their basic supplies and provisions from the neighbouring areas.
5. Water sources are disrupted and choked by debris from landslides.
6. The river sediment load is increased considerably, causing irregular courses and frequent breaching of the banks- resulting into unexpected floods.
7. The water channels are affected from the up hillside due to which the villagers are devoid of water for irrigation purposes. This adversely affects agriculture production in the region.

**India among nations most affected by landslides due to human activities: study:**
1. Landslides triggered by human activities are on the rise around the world and India is among the most-affected countries, accounting for at least 28% of such events over last 12 years, according to a study published.

2. Researchers compiled data on over 4,800 fatal landslides which occurred from 2004 to 2016, leaving out those caused by earthquakes.

3. More than 56,000 people were killed by landslides around the world during the period, a majority of which involved a single slope, according to the study based on the Global Fatal Landslide Database (GFLD).

4. At least 700 of these fatal landslides were caused by construction works, illegal mining and unregulated hill-cutting.

5. While the trend is global, Asia was found to be the most-affected continent where 75% of landslides occurred, with a substantial number reported along the Himalayan Arc.

6. All countries in the top 10 for fatal landslides triggered by human activity are located in Asia. India accounts for 20% of these incidents.

7. The research said human-triggered fatal landslides are increasing at the highest rate in India, where 28% construction-triggered landslide events occurred during the period, followed by China (9%), Pakistan (6%), the Philippines (5%), Nepal (5%) and Malaysia (5%).

8. We were aware that humans are placing increasing pressure on their local environment, but it was surprising to find clear trends within the database that fatal landslides triggered by construction, illegal hill-cutting and illegal mining were increasing globally during the period.

National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) demarcate zoning laws:

The objective of the NLSM maps is to help State and district authorities incorporate the risk of landslides into zoning laws.

However, just as in the case of earthquake zonation maps, or for that matter, any exercise to scientifically ascertain the risk from natural hazards to a region, these laws are barely implemented in the right spirit.

And this is not unique to Kerala. The details might vary but it is now beyond contestation that India is living in a new climate normal.

Frequent high intensity bursts of rain will co-exist along with long dry spells. It has emerged from studies of Kerala’s topography that quarrying and the unscientific cutting of slopes into hills aggravates the risk of soil erosion.

Conclusion:

Operationalising the State’s disaster management apparatus and allocating funds for preparedness are key policy responses, but Kerala also must double down on enforcing regulations and observing zoning laws as well as ensuring that slopes carved into hilly terrain have adequate provisions for draining water.

A lack of compliance with such principles is often a key reason why natural hazards end up causing a significant number of avoidable casualties.

There is a cost to pursuing development goals without paying attention to environmental constraints.
Way Forward: Preparedness and Mitigation:

Important preparatory strategies could involve **monitoring and landslide prediction**. The National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM) programme of the Geological Survey of India could help assess the vulnerability of the districts and this could allow the concerned states to plan accordingly.

**Installing early warning systems** based on the monitoring of ground conditions like slope displacement, strain in soil and rocks, groundwater levels can help warn the residents and authorities of the risks.

**Landslide Education, Awareness and Capacity Building** among the residents and the local administration must be an important preparation strategy.

The **district and state disaster management apparatus** should be ready for intervention at a short notice.

9. Resurrecting the right to know

**Clause 6: Constitutional, Legislative & Administrative safeguards**

*Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.*

A number of actions have been taken under this clause so far which includes - The Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society was established under clause 6 of the historic Assam Accord and committed to work for preservation, promotion and upliftment of culture of the people of Assam.

Context:

A **High Level Committee (HLC)** chaired by a retired judge of the Gauhati High Court and including, among others, the Advocates General of two Northeast States was constituted by the Home Ministry through a gazette notification of July 15, 2019.

Its mandate was, among others, to recommend **measures to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord and define “Assamese People”**.

The HLC finalised its report by mid-February 2020 and submitted it to the Assam Chief Minister soon after. He handed over the report to the Union Home Minister on March 20.

**MHA’s Clause 6 panel sets 1951 as year to determine Assamese:**
A high-level committee on implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs has said that ‘Assamese people’ should be determined by taking 1951 as a cut-off year.

The report said that the definition of ‘Assamese People’ for the purpose of implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord should include Indigenous Tribals as well as other Indigenous Communities of Assam, all other citizens of India residing in the territory of Assam on or before 01.01.1951 and Indigenous Assamese and their descendants.

What is Assam Accord?

1. The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.

2. It was a tripartite accord signed between the Government of India, State Government of Assam and the leaders of the Assam Movement in 1985.

3. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.

4. As per the Accord, those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years.

5. The Accord also mentions that the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.

6. Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.

Clause 6 of the Accord:

It says that constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

The committee chaired by Biplab Kumar Sarma was constituted to define ‘Assamese People’ and institute safeguards for them.

Recommendation of the committee chaired by Biplab Kumar Sarma:

The report proposes January 1951 as the cut-off date for any Indian citizen residing in Assam to be defined as an Assamese for the purpose of implementing Clause 6.

The report seeks reservation for Assamese in Parliament, state assembly, local bodies. It recommended creating an Upper House (Legislative Council of Assam) whose seats will be reserved for the ‘Assamese people’. The report also seeks quotas in government jobs.

Development in the right to information campaign:

A significant development in the right to information campaign has largely gone unnoticed.

The resurrection of the right to know is momentous considering that we are increasingly witnessing an unfortunate denial of information while forgetting the right to know.
Sitting idle over a report is not an uncommon phenomenon. The Vohra Committee report on the alleged nexus between politicians and criminals was kept under wraps for almost two years. It was tabled in Parliament following a public uproar on the murder of Naina Sahni by a prominent politician.

The key legal and constitutional issue that needs to be considered is whether the definition of an Assamese or a Bengali or a Punjabi or a Tamil define her/his Indian-ness or an Indian citizenship.

The definition of Assamese is connected to the NRC process as the Assam Accord cannot be reviewed in isolation of one clause or the other.

**The Right to know and concept of freedom of speech:**

1. **The right to know** was recognised nearly 50 years ago and is the foundational basis or the direct emanation for the **right to information**.

2. In *State of U.P. v. Raj Narain (1975)*, the Supreme Court carved out a class of documents that **demand protection** even though their contents may not be damaging to the national interest.

3. For example, Cabinet papers, foreign office despatches, papers regarding the security of the state and high-level interdepartmental minutes.

4. A **pragmatic view** was held that “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.

5. They are entitled to know the **particulars of every public transaction** in all its bearing.

6. **The right to know**, which is derived from the **concept of freedom of speech**, though not absolute, is a factor which should make one wary, when secrecy is claimed for transactions which can, at any rate, have no repercussion on public security.”

7. This view was **endorsed in S.P. Gupta v. President of India (1981)** and a few other decisions.

8. In S.P. Gupta, Justice Venkataramiah observed that “the tendency in all democratic countries in recent times is to liberalise the restrictions placed on the right of the citizens to know what is happening in the various public offices.

9. The emphasis now is **more on the right of a citizen to know than on his ‘need to know’ the contents of official documents.”

**Conclusion: Being more transparent is the Way Forward:**

Keeping in mind the view expressed by the Supreme Court over nearly 50 years, it is clear that the **Official Secrets Act is not attracted to the disclosure of the HLC report**.

There is no doubt that a **bold and progressive decision** has been taken by AASU to release the report in public interest.

Hopefully, this will encourage governments to effectuate the citizen’s right to know and be **more transparent in public interest**, as long as the security of the country is not jeopardised.

As observed by the Supreme Court in S.P. Gupta: “**If secrecy** were to be observed in the **functioning of government** and the processes of government were to be kept **hidden from public scrutiny**, it would tend to promote and encourage oppression, corruption and misuse or abuse of authority, **for it would all be shrouded in the veil of secrecy without any public accountability.”
10. Taking nuclear vulnerabilities seriously

Context:
Seventy-five years ago, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was destroyed by one single atomic bomb. Three days later, a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki.

Those two bombs killed over 2,00,000 people, some of them instantaneously, and others within five months. Another 2,00,000 people or more who survived the bombings of these two cities, most of them injured, have been called the hibakusha.

Because of the long-lasting effects of radiation exposure as well as the mental trauma they underwent, the plight of these survivors has been difficult.

Nuclear Armed Countries:
While Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been the last two cities to be destroyed by nuclear weapons, we cannot be sure that they will be the last.

Since 1945, the United States, the Soviet Union/Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea have armed themselves with nuclear weapons that have much more destructive power in comparison to those that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Damage and vulnerability with the present nuclear weapons:
1. Over 1,26,000 nuclear weapons have been built since the beginning of the atomic age.
2. Over 2,000 of them have been used in nuclear tests, above and below the ground, to demonstrate their explosive power, causing grave and long-lasting damage to the environment and public health.
3. But this damage is nothing compared to what might happen if some of the existing weapons are used against civilian populations.
4. An appreciation of the scale of the potential damage and a realisation that nuclear weapons could be launched at any moment against any target around the world should instil a sense of vulnerability in all of us.

5. To appreciate why we are vulnerable, we should start by realising that there is no realistic way to protect ourselves against nuclear weapons, whether they are used deliberately, inadvertently, or accidentally.

6. The invention of ballistic missiles at the end of the 1950s, with their great speed of delivery, has made it impossible to intercept nuclear weapons once they are launched.

7. Nuclear weapon states are targets of other nuclear weapon states, of course, but non-nuclear weapon states are vulnerable as well.

**Nuclear-Weapon States:**

The nuclear-weapon states (NWS) are the five states: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States officially recognized as possessing nuclear weapons by the NPT.

The treaty legitimizes these states nuclear arsenals, but establishes they are not supposed to build and maintain such weapons in perpetuity.

In 2000, the NWS committed themselves to an “unequivocal undertaking...to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.”

Because of the secretive nature with which most governments treat information about their nuclear arsenals, most of the figures below are best estimates of each nuclear-weapon state’s nuclear holdings, including both strategic warheads and shorter-range and lower-yield nuclear bombs, generally referred to as tactical nuclear weapons.

**Low levels of transparency:**

The availability of reliable information on the status of the nuclear arsenals and capabilities of the nuclear-armed states varied considerably, the report noted.

The governments of India and Pakistan make statements about some of their missile tests but provide little information about the status or size of their arsenals.

The U.S. had disclosed important information about its stockpile and nuclear capabilities, but in 2019, the administration ended the practice of publicly disclosing the size of its stockpile.

The U.S. and Russia have reduced their nuclear arsenals under the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) but it will lapse in February 2021 unless both parties agree to prolong it.

Russia and the U.S. have already announced extensive plans to replace and modernise their nuclear warheads and delivery systems.

Both countries have also given new or expanded roles to nuclear weapons in their military plans and doctrines, which marks a significant reversal of the post-Cold War trend towards the gradual marginalisation of nuclear weapons.

**The problems of deterrence:**
1. Nuclear weapon states have reacted to this vulnerability by coming up with a comforting idea: that the use of nuclear weapons is impossible because of deterrence.

2. Nuclear weapons are so destructive that no country would use them, because such use would invite retaliation in kind, and no political leader would be willing to risk the possible death of millions of their citizens. That was the idea of deterrence.

3. Deterrence enthusiasts claim that nuclear weapons do not just protect countries against use of nuclear weapons by others, but even prevent war and promote stability.

4. These claims do not hold up to evidence. Nuclear threats have not always produced fear and, in turn, fear has not always induced caution.

5. To the contrary, nuclear threats in some cases have produced anger, and anger can trigger a drive to escalate, as was the case with Fidel Castro during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

6. Moreover, the apparent efficacy of deterrence in some cases may have been due to the more credible prospect of retaliation with conventional weapons.

While humanity has luckily survived 75 years without experiencing nuclear war, can one expect luck to last indefinitely?

In several historical instances, what prevented the use of nuclear weapons was not control practices but either their failure or factors outside institutional control.

The most famous of these cases is the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. There are likely many more cases during which the world came close to nuclear war but because of the secrecy that surrounds nuclear weapons, we might never know.

Way Forward: We must do more to prevent nuclear war:

At the UN General Assembly on 7 July 2017, an overwhelming majority of nations, 122 of the UN’s 190, voted to frame a global “Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty”.

Once ratified by 50 UN states, this treaty would prohibit nations developing, testing, possessing, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons. So far, 33 have ratified.

First, we must demand that the nuclear weapons states move to the situation that most imagine, quite wrongly, already exists, namely deterrance based on shared vulnerability.

We shall know deterrence actually exists when only a few nuclear weapons remain.

We shall also know deterrence is the aim when these weapons are no longer kept on alert, being instead separated from their warheads. This is not a preposterous demand.

Second, we must resolve, at last, to implement a solemn agreement made by almost all the nuclear and non-nuclear states as long as half a century ago.

It is an agreement to outlaw nuclear weapons. This lies at the heart of the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, the central arms control agreement of the age.

In the intervening years, those five have been joined by a further four, and all nine can be seen to be extending their nuclear arsenals.
Yet in the **New START agreement**, **limiting the number of nuclear warheads** deployed by the superpowers, the central assertion is that more weapons would be accompanied by less security.

This is an important step on the path to acknowledging that the continued existence of these weapons poses an unacceptable threat to humankind.
1. Pendency of Case & Virtual Courts

Context:

Mounting pendency of cases from the Supreme Court to the lower courts has Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu worried as he expressed concern on the issue. Vide President also urged the government and the judiciary to ensure faster justice. Vice President underscored the need to make delivery of justice speedier and affordable. Citing adjournment of cases over long periods, he observed that justice was becoming costly and referred to the well-known proverb “justice delayed is justice denied”.

In a significant statement, the Vice President remarked that Public Interest Litigations (PILs) should not become private interest litigations for personal, pecuniary and political interests.

In this edition of The Big Picture we will analyse the issue of pendency of cases and the role of virtual courts.

Present situation of Indian Judicial system:

There are more than 3 crore cases pending in different courts of India. Many of these cases are pending for more than 10 years. Below are the approximate number of cases pending in Supreme Court, High Courts and District and Subordinate courts in India.

1. Around 60,000 cases are pending in Supreme Court.
2. Around 42 lakh cases are pending in different High Courts.
3. Around 2.7 crore cases pending in District and Sub-ordinate Courts.

The issue of pendency of cases:

According to the Economic Survey 2018-19, there are about 3.5 crore cases pending in the judicial system, especially in district and subordinate courts.

About 87.54 per cent of the total pendency of cases is in the district and subordinate courts. More than 64% of all cases are pending for more than 1 year.

The average disposal time for civil and criminal cases in Indian District & Subordinate courts in 2018 was 4.4 fold and 6 fold higher respectively when compared with the average of Council of Europe members (2016)

A Case Clearance Rate of 100 percent (i.e. zero accumulation) can be achieved with the addition of merely 2,279 judges in the lower courts, 93 in High Courts and only one in the Supreme Court, which is already within sanctioned strength and only needs filling of vacancies.
The Ease of Doing Business Report of the World Bank for 2018 and 2019 shows that the time taken to decide a case has remained static at 1,445 days.

**Issue of Vacancy of Judges**

*Vacancy of judges across courts in India* has affected the functioning of the judiciary, particularly in relation to the disposal of cases.

Between 2006 and 2017, the number of *vacancies in the High Courts* has increased from 16% to 37%, and in the *subordinate courts from 19% to 25%*.

As of 2017, High Courts have 403 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 1,079 judges, and subordinate courts have 5,676 vacancies against a sanctioned strength of 22,704 judges.

As of 2017, among the major High Courts (with sanctioned strength over 10 judges), the highest proportion of vacancies was in Karnataka High Court at 60% (37 vacancies), followed by Calcutta High Court at 54% (39 vacancies).

Similarly, in *major subordinate courts* (with sanctioned strength over 100 judges), the highest proportion of vacancies was in Bihar High Court at 46% (835 vacancies), followed by Uttar Pradesh High Court at 42% (1,348 vacancies).

**Role of Virtual Courts:**

1. Virtual Courts is a concept aimed at eliminating the presence of litigants or lawyers in the court and adjudication of the case online.
2. An *e-court or Electronic Court* means a location in which matters of law are adjudicated upon, in the presence of qualified Judge(s) and which has a well-developed technical infrastructure.
3. The e-courts are different from the computerised courts which have been in place since the 1990s.
4. The working of e-courts requires an Online environment and an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled infrastructure.
5. This would be beneficial for both improving the court processes and rendering citizen-centric services.
6. *e-Courts are aimed to make legal processes easier and more user friendly.*
7. Litigants can view the status of their case online through various channels created for service delivery.
8. Litigants can file the plaint electronically through e-Filing and also pay the Court Fees or Fine online through.

**Challenges that need to be addressed to develop virtual courts:**

In the present circumstances, the virtual courts may seem a necessity, however, it goes without saying that at present there are a whole lot of glitches and shortcomings in its execution.

1. Challenges can erupt due to insufficient infrastructure and non-availability of electricity and internet connectivity in most of the Talukas/villages.
2. Electricity connection is a must along with internet connectivity and computers to ensure justice reaches every section equally.
3. The e-filling process is riddled with endless complications. e-Courts will also prove to be cost-intensive as setting up state of the art e-courts will require the deployment of new-age technology.

4. On the top of technology, cyber-security will be a huge concern too. The government has initiated remedial steps to address this problem and formulated the Cyber Security Strategy but it is more on the side of prescribed guidelines alone. The practical and actual implementation of the same remains to be seen.

5. The paralegal staff is not well equipped and trained to effectively handle document or record evidence, and make them readily accessible to the litigant, to the council as well as to the court.

6. Other issues might involve the litigant’s lack of confidence in the process due to lack of proximity.

Way Forward:

Speedy Justice is not only a fundamental right but also a prerequisite of maintaining the rule of law and delivering good governance.

In its absence, Judicial system ends up serving the interests of the corrupt and the law-breakers.

Judicial reforms, if taken seriously, expeditious and effective justice can see the light of day and improve India’s standing in the reports of the World Bank and other institutions and organisations that study judicial processes.

For enhancing productivity in the judiciary, the Economic Survey 2018-19 suggests:

Increased number of working days; Establishment of Indian Courts and Tribunal Services to focus on the administrative aspects of the legal system;

Deployment of technology to improve efficiency of the courts, e.g. eCourts Mission Mode Project and the National Judicial Data Grid being rolled-out in phases by the Ministry of Law and Justice.

2. 74th Independence Day - India, Neighbourhood & World

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation from the majestic Red Fort on the occasion of India’s 74th Independence Day.

PM Modi focused on the themes of "Aatma Nirbhar Bharat", "Vocal for local" and "Make in India to Make for World".

PM Modi also paid tribute to those on the frontlines of the fight against the coronavirus and declared that India had a roadmap ready for the production and distribution of three COVID-19 vaccines that are at various stages of testing.

Corona Warriors: Seva Parmo Dharma:

1. In this extraordinary time of Corona, Corona warriors have lived the mantra of 'Seva Parmo Dharma.'

2. Our doctors, nurses, paramedical staff, ambulance personnel, safai karmacharis, policemen, service personnel and many people are working round the clock continuously.
3. Amid Covid pandemic, 130 crore Indians took the **resolve to be self-reliant**, and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' is on the mind of India. This dream is turning into a pledge. Aatmanirbhar Bharat has become a 'mantra' for the 130 crore Indians today.

4. Only a few months ago, we used to import N-95 masks, PPE kits, and ventilators from abroad. We not only made N-95 masks, PPE kits and ventilators during the pandemic, but were able to export these to all over the world.

5. When Corona started, there was only one Lab for Corona Testing in our country. Today there are more than 1,400 Labs in the country.

6. Today, not one, not two, **three vaccines of Corana** are currently under testing phase in India. As soon as the green signal is received from the scientists, the country's preparation is also **ready for mass production of those vaccines**.

**National Digital Health Mission:**

**Every Indian will be given a health ID.** National Digital Health Mission will bring a **new revolution in India's health sector.**

All your tests, every disease, which doctor gave you which medicine, when, what were your reports, all these information will be contained in this one health ID.

**Make in India to Make for World:**

**Building New India: The National Infrastructure Pipeline:**

1. To achieve the **GDP of $5 trillion by 2024-25**, India needs to spend about **$1.4 trillion (Rs. 100 lakh crore)** over these years on infrastructure.

2. The National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP), an investment plan unveiled by the central government for enhancing infrastructure in identified sectors is a first-of-its-kind exercise to provide **world-class infrastructure** across the country and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

3. In the past decade (FY 2008-17), India invested about $1.1 trillion on infrastructure. The challenge is to step-up annual infrastructure investment so that lack of infrastructure does not become a binding constraint on the growth of the Indian economy.

4. During the fiscals 2020 to 2025, sectors such as Energy (24%), Roads (19%), Urban (16%), and Railways (13%) amount to around 70% of the projected capital expenditure in infrastructure in India.

**Expanded and Extended Neighbourhood:**

**From the LOC to the LAC**, whoever has raised eyes on the sovereignty of the country, the country, the army of the country has responded in the same language. Respect for India's sovereignty is supreme for us.

**Our border and coastal infrastructure** also have a huge role in the security of the country.

Be it the Himalayan peaks or the islands of the Indian Ocean, today there is an unprecedented expansion of road and internet connectivity in the country.

The **expansion of NCC** will be ensured to **173 border and coastal districts** of the country.
Under this campaign, special training will be given to about 1 lakh new NCC Cadets. In this also, about one-third of the daughters will be given this special training.

**Agriculture Infrastructure Fund:**

There was a time when our agricultural system was very backward. The biggest concern then was how to feed the countrymen.

Today, we can feed not only India but many countries of the world. **Self-reliant India not only means reduction of imports, but also to increase our skills and our creativity.**

**Self-reliant India has an important priority - self-sufficient agriculture and self-reliant farmers.**

To provide modern infrastructure to the farmers of the country, a few days ago 'Agriculture Infrastructure Fund' of Rs 1 lakh crore has been created.

**Education, Women Empowerment and Environment:**

1. Education of the country has great importance in **building self-reliant India**, in building modern India, in building new India, in building prosperous India. With this thinking, the country has got a **new National Education Policy**.

2. A special campaign with a **holistic approach to reduce pollution** in 100 selected cities of the country is also being worked on.

3. Our experience says that whenever there is an **opportunity for women power in India**, they have brought laurels to the country, strengthened the country.

4. Today, women are not only working in underground coal mines, but also flying fighter planes, touching new heights in sky.

5. India is fully sensitive to the **preservation and promotion of its biodiversity**. In the recent past, the **tiger population** has increased at a rapid pace in the country! Now a **project lion for our Asiatic lions** is also going to be started in the country. Similarly, **Project Dolphin** will also be launched.

**Conclusion:**

**Efficient creation and implementation of infrastructure projects** require meticulous planning and design.

To avoid delays or scrapping of projects, an improved project preparation process through a **framework combining transparent policy, legality, strong public institutions, guidelines and standard processes, quality measures and an empowered project organisation** is imperative.

To increase the effective participation of the private sector, an **enabling environment and capacity development** of the private and public sectors is imperative.

Joint ventures and collaborations with global players are also envisaged to facilitate a robust pool of competent developers, enhancing execution capacity of private sector participants.

To draw up the NIP, a **bottom-up approach** was adopted wherein all projects costing greater than INR 100 crore per project under construction, proposed greenfield projects, brownfield projects and those at the conceptualisation stage were sought to be captured.

India has always followed the adage - ‘Whole world is one family’. Vinoba ji used to **hail the world**.
Therefore, the world is one family for us. So, alongside financial development, mankind and humanity should also get importance. And we follow this dictum.

3. FATF and Pakistan's Terror List

Context:

In an attempt to be dropped from the **Financial Action Task Force’s grey list**, Pakistan has banned 88 new terrorists, in compliance with the new list issued by the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**.

The banned terrorists include Hafiz Saeed, Masood Azhar and Dawood Ibrahim. **Paris-based FATF** put Pakistan on the grey list in June 2018 and asked Islamabad to implement a plan of action by the end of 2019, but the deadline was extended later due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Pakistan government issued two notifications announcing sanctions on key leaders of terror outfits such as 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar, and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim. In this edition of The Big Picture we will analyse FATF and Pakistan's terror list.

**About Financial Action Task Force:**

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an **inter-governmental body** established in 1989 during the **G7 Summit in Paris**.

The **objectives** of the FATF are to **set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures** for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

Member Countries: As of 2019, it consists of thirty-seven member jurisdictions. India is one of the members.

**FATF has two lists:**

**Grey List:** Countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a **warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.**

**Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put in the blacklist.

These countries support terror funding and money laundering activities. The FATF revises the blacklist regularly, adding or deleting entries.

The FATF Plenary is the decision-making body of the FATF. It meets **three times per year.**

**FATF & Pakistan:**

**Pakistan** was placed on the **grey list by the FATF in June 2018** and was given a plan of action to complete by October 2019, or face the risk of being placed on the black list with Iran and North Korea.

Pakistan was previously placed on the FATF's grey list in February 2012, and had been removed from the grey list in February 2015 after it passed a **National Action Plan (NAP)** to deal with **terrorism** after the Peshawar School massacre in December 2014.

It was placed under **severe restrictions in the years 2008-2012.**
India's UN Mission Exposes Pakistan's Lies At United Nations: Report:

1. India hit out at Pakistan for its litany of lies at the United Nations after Islamabad's UN envoy claimed to have given a statement that the biggest sponsor of cross-border terrorism against it now tries to "masquerade itself as a victim of terror".

2. Calling out Pakistan's lie that it has been a target of cross-border terrorism for decades, India said a lie repeated a hundred times will not become truth.

3. India's Permanent Mission to the UN said the biggest sponsor of cross-border terrorism against India now tries to masquerade itself as a victim of terrorism.

4. India also said that "Pakistan is home to the largest number of terrorists proscribed by the UN and many of the sanctioned terrorists and entities continue to operate with impunity inside Pakistan.

5. Prime Minister of Pakistan himself had admitted at the General Assembly last year about the presence of 40,000-50,000 terrorists inside Pakistan.

6. The 1267 Committee works on the basis of evidence and not random accusations thrown in to divert their time and attention." India said in response to a lie made by Pakistan that it has submitted names of some Indians to be proscribed under the Sanctions List.

7. In a strong response to Islamabad raking up the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in the remarks, India said Pakistan makes "ridiculous assertions" about internal affairs of India.

If Pakistan is in the grey list: Impact on Pakistan:

By remaining on the “Grey List”, it would be difficult for Pakistan to get financial aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and European Union, making its financial condition more precarious.

However, there are no immediate implications for the recent $6 billion loan negotiated with the IMF that is to be disbursed over the next three years.

The country is facing a number of economic challenges with its economy expected to grow at 3.3 % in 2019 and 2.6% in 2020, according to IMF.

Inflation is set to touch 7.3% in 2019, up from 3.9% in 2018, and rise to 13% in 2020. Fiscal deficit is projected at 7.1% of GDP in 2020, the highest in the last seven years.

Pakistan’s economy will be ruined due to inflation if put on FATF blacklist:

If Pakistan was placed on the blacklist, the country would suffer the challenges faced by Iran.

People talk about inflation now. If Pakistan is placed on the blacklist, then the country will experience inflation that would ruin our economy.

Therefore, the international community keeps asking Pakistan to prosecute leaders for accessing illicit funds and to tighten laws and banking security regulations relating to terrorist groups.

Thus, Pakistan continues to play a cat and mouse game with the international community on terror financing.

It has become very good at parrying pressure since it was warned in 1992, for the first time by the Americans, about harbouring and nurturing jihadi groups targeting India.
Conclusion:
India also pointed out that **Pakistan** was home to the maximum number of terror groups proscribed by the UN and many of the terrorists and entities under UN sanctions continued to operate with impunity inside the country.

India said that coming from a country which is a known **sponsor of cross-border terrorism** which has made the **world suffer** due to its actions, this claim is nothing short of being preposterous.

Pakistan consistently rakes up the **issue of Jammu and Kashmir** and other internal matters of India at various UN fora in its bid to internationalise the issue but has repeatedly **failed to get any support** from the broader UN membership for its agenda.

4. Beirut Blast - Impact on Region & World

**Context:**
The Lebanese government has resigned amid growing public anger following a **devastating explosion in Beirut** on 4 August that **killed at least 200 people** and injured about 5,000 others.

The blast came at a difficult time for Lebanon, which is not only trying to curb the **spread of the coronavirus** but is also mired in an **unprecedented economic crisis**.

A shock wave raced from the site of the blast, on Beirut’s industrial waterfront, into the **city’s densely populated** residential neighbourhoods and downtown shopping districts.

Dozens of nearby buildings including grain silos storing around 85 percent of the country’s grain were severely damaged or destroyed, imagery from the aftermath showed.

The economic situation has pushed tens of thousands of people **into poverty** and **triggered large anti-government protests**.

In this edition of The Big Picture we will analyse the Blast in Beirut and the impact it has had on the country, region and world.

**Geographical Location of Lebanon:**
It is a country in Western Asia, bordered by Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south, while Cyprus lies west across the Mediterranean Sea.

Lebanon witnessed **Civil war from 1975-1990** that was a result of conflict between various factions like the Christians, the left-wing Druze and the Muslims and was interspersed with Israeli invasions targeting the palestinian militants in Lebanon.

The present government in Lebanon is **confessionalist parliamentary democracy**.

Confessionalism is a system of government which apportions seats in its legislature to different groups of people strictly based on demographic composition.

**Impact of the Blast on Lebanon in various dimensions:**

1. Lebanon is an **import-dependent country**. The badly damaged port facility is Lebanon’s **largest maritime gateway** and it will make essential items expensive and **threaten food security** in the country.
2. Lebanon faced nationwide protests against corruption, economic mismanagement and sectarian politics in October 2019, which forced the resignation of then-Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

3. This blast along with the growing economic crisis can again cause social unrest.

4. Lebanon has already been struggling with a huge economic meltdown, with the rapid devaluation of the local currency and a volatile exchange rate on the black-market fuelling inflation, shuttering businesses, unemployment and poverty.

5. It had also defaulted on a Eurobond repayment in March 2020. It is in talks with the International Monetary Fund for a $10 billion loan program.

6. The blast will pose an additional financial burden of rebuilding the city.

7. The country’s health system is already burdened with the patients of Covid-19 pandemic and the victims of blast will add to this.

Ammonium Nitrate (NH4NO3):

1. Ammonium Nitrate (NH4NO3) is a nitrogen-rich white, crystalline chemical which is soluble in water.

2. It is the main component of the explosive composition known as ANFO- ammonium nitrate fuel oil.

3. Pure ammonium nitrate is not an explosive on its own. For Ammonium nitrate to be explosive a primary explosive or detonator like RDX or TNT is required.

4. Many Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) used by terrorists around the world have ANFO as the main explosive.

5. Stored ammonium nitrate is a fire hazard and can explode in two ways. It may come in contact with some explosive mixture.

6. Due to the oxidation process at large scale, heat may be generated starting a fire and then explosion. This seems to be the primary likely cause of the incident at Beirut port.

Stored ammonium nitrate is a major fire hazard:

Large quantities of stored ammonium nitrate are regarded as a major fire hazard, with multiple reported cases across the world. The explosion of large storage can happen primarily in two ways.

One is by some type detonation or initiation because the storage comes in contact with explosive mixture.

Second, the blast can result due to a fire which starts in the ammonium nitrate store because of the heat generated due to the oxidation process at large scale.

The second one seems to be the primary likely cause of the incident at Beirut port.

There are several documented examples of deadly ammonium nitrate fire and explosion incidents in the past, some with large numbers of fatalities like in China in 2015 and in Texas in 1947.

How this can be safely stored then?

There are generally very strict rules about where it can be stored: for example, it must be kept away from fuels and sources of heat.
Many countries add calcium carbonate to ammonium nitrate in order to create calcium ammonium nitrate, which is safer.

Proper inspection should be done.

**Regulations in India about ammonium nitrate:**

Because it is used as an *ingredient* for the production of industrial explosives, anaesthetic gases, fertilisers, cold packs and has a strong possibility of misuse, ammonium nitrate is highly regulated in India, at least in letter.

The manufacture, conversion, bagging, import, export, transport, possession for sale or use of ammonium nitrate is covered under The Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012.

The rules also make storage of ammonium nitrate in large quantities in populated areas illegal in India.

For the manufacture of ammonium nitrate, an Industrial licence is required under the Industrial Development and Regulation Act, 1951.

A license under the Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012 is also required for any activity related to ammonium nitrate.

**Conclusion:**

Lebanon cannot do without containing politically extremist groups functioning in the country and maintaining healthy relationships with the international community.

It is time that *international solidarity* comes into action and extends a helping hand towards the country.

5. **India - Nepal Development Partnership**

**Context:**

Senior diplomats of India and Nepal on August 17 held a *virtual meeting* to review the progress made on various India-aided developmental projects being implemented in the Himalayan nation.

The meeting came days after Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli telephoned Prime Minister Narendra Modi to greet him on India's 74th Independence Day, in the *first high-level contact* after bilateral ties came under severe strain.

According to the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, India and Nepal held the *8th meeting of the Oversight Mechanism (OSM)* through digital video conferencing.

The meeting carried out a *comprehensive review of bilateral economic and development cooperation projects*.

**Recent strain in India-Nepal Relations:**

A Constitution amendment Bill was passed by Nepal’s parliament to legitimize the alteration or addition of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura to the country’s new map.

Recently, the Nepal government referring to the *Treaty of Sugauli, 1816*, took a decision to *adopt a new political map* that claims Indian territory of Lipulekh, Kalapani and other areas, as a part of Nepal.
The passage of the Bill and the new map had led to breakdown of communication between the two countries.

**Significance of Nepal For India:**

1. Nepal shares **borders with 5 Indian states** - Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Bihar. Hence, is an important point of **cultural and economic exchange**.

2. Nepal is right in the middle of India’s ‘Himalayan frontiers’, and along with Bhutan it acts as northern ‘borderland’ flanks and acts as a buffer against any possible aggression from China.

3. Rivers originating in Nepal feed the perennial river systems of India in terms of ecology and hydropower potential.

4. Many Hindu and Buddhist religious sites are in Nepal making it an important pilgrimage site for a large number of Indians.

5. The **India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950** forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.

6. The two countries not only share an **open border and unhindered movement of people**, but they also have close bonds through marriages and familial ties, popularly known as **Roti-Beti ka Rishta**.

**India-China-Nepal:**

1. Since the 1962 war with China, India has deployed the **ITBP at Kalapani**, which is advantageously located at a height of over 20,000 ft and serves as an observation post for that area.

2. Nepal calls it an encroachment by the Indian security forces. Nepal has also been unhappy about the **China-India trading post at Lipu Lekh**, the earliest to be established between the two countries.

3. Shipkila in Himachal followed two years later, and Nathu La only in 2006.

4. Nepali youth protested in Kalapani, and there were protests in Nepal’s Parliament too when India and China agreed to increase border trade through Lipu Lekh during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Beijing in 2016.

5. A year later, **during the Doklam crisis**, a senior official in the Chinese Foreign Ministry raised temperatures by suggesting that India would not be able to do anything if the PLA decided to walk in “through Kalapani or into Kashmir, through PoK”, both trijunctions like Doklam.

6. Though China has said nothing about the **road construction to Lipu Lekh**, it has protested similar road building activity at other places on the Indian side close to the LAC, including Ladakh.

7. In view of all this, **Kalapani and the approach to Lipu Lekh** has only grown in **strategic importance for India**, especially as relations between the two countries have remained uneven over the last few years, and China has upped its game for influence in India’s neighbourhood.

8. India’s tacit support to a blockade of the landlocked country during protests over the new Constitution in Nepal by the Madhesi community was an inflection point in the relationship.

9. Despite the **open border with India** and the **people to people contact** through the hundreds of thousands of Nepali people who live and work in this country, the levels of distrust in Nepal about India have only increased.
10. For its part, India perceives Nepal to be tilting towards China under the leadership of Prime Minister K P Oli and his Nepal Communist Party.

11. Responding to Nepal’s protests, India has said it is ready to discuss the matter at foreign secretary level talks between the two countries.

12. The talks were meant to be held earlier this year, but were put off due to the COVID outbreak.

**Motihari-Amlekhgunj Pipeline:**

Prime Ministers of India and Nepal have jointly inaugurated a cross-border petroleum products pipeline.

Pipeline carries petroleum products from Motihari in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal. This is South Asia’s first cross-border petroleum products pipeline.

It is 69-km long having a capacity of 2 million metric ton per annum, will provide cleaner petroleum products at affordable cost to the people of Nepal.

**Nepal proposes meeting of boundary work group by September:**

Amid the boundary dispute, Kathmandu is learnt to have proposed a meeting of the Boundary Working Group (BWG) in August end or early September.

The BWG is a joint agency constituted by the governments of India and Nepal in 2014 to carry out works in the fields of construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars including clearance of ‘no-man’s land’ and other technical tasks.

In 2017, the two sides had finalised the comprehensive plan and modalities for execution and completion of boundary work in the next five years.

The BWG’s inputs are critical as they are given to the governments on the basis of field-level survey.

**India, Nepal talk projects on river from Kalapani:**

Officials of Nepal and India met to discuss projects in Nepal being assisted by the Indian government.

These include the Pancheshwar multipurpose project and motorable bridges over the Mahakali (Kali, Sharda) river which originates in the Kalapani area, at the centre of a boundary dispute which peaked in May and froze bilateral dialogue.

Sources said the conversation was “positive” and “productive” although the boundary dispute was not discussed.

The meeting focused on border infrastructure projects and a cross-border oil pipeline.

**Conclusion:**

Nepal’s Foreign Ministry said, “they agreed to undertake necessary measures to timely address problems and obstacles in the course of implementation”.

The MEA too said both sides agreed to “expedite their implementation”. Both agreed to hold the next meeting at a mutually convenient date.
India should provide an alternative narrative for India-Nepal ties, one that takes into account longstanding people-to-people ties and cultural connect.

With its immense strategic relevance in the Indian context as Indian security concern, stable and secure Nepal is one requisite which India can’t afford to overlook.

6. India - UAE Deepening Relationship

Context:

India sought investments from the United Arab Emirates in key sectors like infrastructure, highways, ports, airports, renewable energy and defence as the two sides discussed a joint strategy to offset the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The matters came up during a virtual meeting of the India-UAE joint commission on trade, economic and technical cooperation, which was co-chaired by external affairs minister and his UAE counterpart.

The two sides assessed their cooperation over the past few months in the fight against Covid-19 and discussed a joint strategy to offset the economic and social impact of the pandemic on both countries.

Key Highlights of India-UAE Meeting:

1. India invited further investments from UAE in key sectors of Indian Economy such as infrastructure including logistics, food parks, highways, ports, airports, renewable energy and defence.

2. India and UAE discussed regional issues concerning their neighbourhood and level of their cooperation at United Nations and other International forums including Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

3. UAE side appreciated the significant contributions made by the Indian expatriate community. Indians form the largest expatriate community in UAE, followed by Pakistan.

4. UAE also expressed its willingness to further strengthen the links in Energy and Food Security.

5. India and UAE expressed satisfaction over continuance of momentum in the bilateral relations various areas for mutual benefit under Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

India-UAE relationship:

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established diplomatic relations in 1972. UAE opened its Embassy in Delhi in 1972 & India opened its Embassy in Abu Dhabi in 1973.

1. UAE is India’s third largest foreign trading partner with bilateral trade at around 53 billion USD.

2. India is UAE’s largest trading partner.

3. UAE is the second largest export destination of Indian Goods and Services.

4. Indians form the largest Foreign Diaspora in UAE with over 3 million people. It is also largest population of Indian expatriates anywhere in the world. They form the soft power of India and the most important element in bilateral relationship – people to people tie.

5. UAE is one of the important crude oil suppliers to India and important for India’s energy security.
6. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has awarded **ZAYED Medal**, the highest civilian award to the Prime Minister of India for consolidating the **long-standing friendship and joint strategic cooperation** between the two nations.

7. It can be noted that recently **India was invited by the host UAE as the "Guest of Honour"** to attend the 46th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

8. This was the **first time that India was invited to any OIC meeting** as a guest of honour.

**Indian Community:**

Indian expatriate community of approx. 3.3 millions is the largest ethnic community in UAE constituting roughly about 30 per cent of the country’s population.

Among the Indian States, Kerala is the most represented followed by Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

However, Indians from the Northern States, all put together, also form a significant portion of the UAE Indian population.

The Indian community has played a **major role in the economic development of the UAE** and is respected for its technical competence, sense of discipline & law abiding nature.

There are various linguistic/regional associations for social and cultural activities.

These associations extend support to the welfare initiatives of the Mission/Consulate and conduct cultural/welfare activities regularly including sports activities

**The changing Middle East:**

1. UAE’s step signals a **realignment in the Middle East** that will have wider ripples.

2. For one, it sharpens the **triangular polarisation** of the region, with countries either siding with the Arabs, Iran or Turkey, or suffering their intervention.

3. Just like in Europe before 1914, the risk of a bigger regional war has sharpened.

4. Unlike that period, there are **external powers** involved that might not see a Middle Eastern war in their interests. So, the security of the region is still enmeshed with its relationship with the United States, Russia, and China.

5. The Arabs (and Israel) enjoy good relations with all three external powers; and China is the only external power that has strong ties with all the regional powers.

6. Through its arms exports, investments and purchasing power, Beijing has ensured that it is seen as an essential partner by all three sides, and the fourth if you include Israel.

7. China can thus play all sides of the Middle Eastern equation, just as the Saudis are well-placed to leverage all sides of the global power equation.

**Opportunities for India:**

**NRI Remittances:** The annual remittances made by the large Indian community in UAE (estimated to be around 3.3 million) amount to over US$ 17.56 billion (Year 2018, source : UAE Central Bank).
Interestingly, Pakistan is moving away from the Saudi camp on the back of its relationship with its new patron, China.

It is also toying with the idea of joining Turkey and Malaysia in a bid to wrest the leadership of the so-called Islamic world away from Saudi Arabia.

For India, the normalisation of ties between Israel and the Gulf Arabs is a good thing — for it opens up greater opportunities for our engagement with the region.

It is important, though, that India does not get drawn to any one side of the Middle Eastern triangle. **Iran is important for India**, and must be engaged regardless of its isolation by the United States.

Despite the realignments, India is well-placed with respect to the Arab states, Israel and Iran.

It is with respect to Turkey that Indian foreign policy needs to find new approaches.

**Conclusion:**

With India’s growing economic, political and strategic interests, it cannot stay aloof for long with current geopolitical environment in Middle East, whether it is war in Yemen to strained ties of UAE and others with Qatar and Iran. India will have to engage more vigorously with developments in the region.

India needs to ensure the execution of the investment projects with required expertise.

Potential areas to enhance bilateral trade include defense trade, food and agricultural products as well as automobiles.

**Medical tourism** can be an important area where India can attract Emiratis. Indian companies with expertise in renewable energy sector can invest in UAE.

Wide-ranging discussions were held in a friendly, frank and constructive atmosphere, reflecting the strong bilateral ties between the two strategic partners.

Both sides agreed to **strengthen cooperation** in ongoing areas and to explore cooperation in newer areas reflecting the changing times.

Both sides also discussed regional issues related to their neighbourhood and cooperation at the UN and other multilateral forums. They also agreed to hold the next session of the joint commission in Abu Dhabi in 2021.

7. **Turkey-Greece Tensions in the Mediterranean**

**Context:**

Turkey’s big push into the Mediterranean featuring gas drilling, tough rhetoric and warships rooted in a grand vision of a "Blue Homeland" is causing concern from EU neighbours.
Fearful of being denied a fair share of the region's bountiful natural gas wealth, Turkey sent a research vessel and a small navy armada into seas Greece claims as its own, dramatically escalating tensions on August 10.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey announced that Turkey had made its biggest-ever discovery of natural gas in the Black Sea.

**Turkey-Greece tensions escalate over Turkish Med drilling plans:**

France, already at odds with Turkey over Libya and parts of the Middle East, sent in its own ships into the region to help out Greece, prompting Erdogan to warn he would retaliate against any attack.

Recently, France has deployed its military in the eastern Mediterranean Sea amid tensions between Greece and Turkey over recently-discovered gas reserves.

According to France the military has been deployed to strengthen the autonomous assessment of the situation and to affirm France’s commitment to free movement, to the security of maritime navigation in the Mediterranean and respect for international law.

**Blue Homeland Doctrine: The doctrine behind Turkey's Mediterranean claims:**

Turkey’s expansionist energy policy in the Eastern Mediterranean is underpinned by a maritime doctrine that has raised the spectre of naval confrontation with Nato allies Greece and France.

The Blue Homeland, or Mavi Vatan, philosophy supports Turkey’s search for gas reserves across a swathe of the Mediterranean and has seen warships head to the region this week.

Critics say the "Blue Homeland" doctrine is the latest example of Turkey resorting to disruption to coerce others into achieving what it wants.

But Turkish officials and former admirals responsible for the policy argue Greece's demands based on a scattering of tiny islands are unfair since Turkey has larger mainland territory in the eastern part of the sea.

**Recently-discovered gas reserves:**

1. The EU’s plans to transport the gas to its mainland, which would help reduce its dependency on Russia, have raised the region’s geopolitical profile.

2. Turkey and Greece have overlapping maritime claims. But when EU members and its allies in West Asia and North Africa made plans to build a gas pipeline from the Mediterranean to Europe’s mainland, they kept Turkey out of it, which infuriated Ankara.

3. Earlier this year, the EastMed Gas Forum was formed by Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan and Palestine, and Turkey was again excluded.

4. But Turkey challenged the pipeline project and reached an agreement with Libya’s Tripoli-based government, which Ankara is backing, to form an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from its southern shores to Libya’s northern coast across the Mediterranean.

5. Greece claimed the Turkish zone violated its maritime sovereignty. Later, Greece announced its EEZ with Egypt, which clashes with Turkey’s zone. Immediately thereafter, Turkey sent its survey ship over.
Overlapping Claims between Turkey and Greece:

Turkey and Greece, vehemently disagree over overlapping claims to hydrocarbon resources in the region based on conflicting views on the extent of their continental shelves in waters dotted with mostly Greek islands.

Turkey says that despite having the longest coastline in the eastern Mediterranean it is confined into a narrow strip of waters due to the extension of Greece's continental shelf, based on the presence of many Greek islands near its shore.

The island of Kastellorizo, which is about 2 km off Turkey's southern coast and 570 km from the Greek mainland, is a particular source of Turkish frustration.

Difficult to demarcate the maritime boundaries:

1. The highly complicated issue now has the potential to involve Europe, West Asia and North Africa.
2. It is difficult to demarcate the maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean, which is dotted with Turkish and Greek islands.
3. Cyprus is physically divided with the southern part ruled by the internationally-recognised government and the northern part controlled by Turkey.
4. Turkey’s survey ship plans exploration activities around Greece’s Crete Island, which lies just outside the Turkish-Libya economic zone, and Greece and Cyprus call it a violation of their sovereignty.
5. France, the EU’s most powerful military force, has thrown its weight behind Greece and Cyprus.
6. Now, an alliance is emerging among Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France, which is backed by Egypt, Israel and the UAE.
7. Turkey stands almost isolated, but remains a key power in the Mediterranean, which requires the EU to tread cautiously.

Conclusion:

If the EU wants to transport gas from the coast of Israel to Europe via Cyprus and Italy, an open conflict with Turkey cannot help.

What is in everybody’s interest is to dial down tensions and find a diplomatic and mutually acceptable solution to the gas contest. Excluding Turkey, which has a long Mediterranean coast, is unwise.

Diplomacy and Dialogue between nations is the only solution. India is not comfortable with Erdogan, his association with Pakistan, and the Kashmir issue.

Allowing a resurgent Turkey to bully smaller powers in the region would be strategically disastrous. The EU has to strike a balance between these two options.
GENERAL STUDIES - III

2. National Infrastructure Pipeline Dashboard

Context:

Monitoring of all infrastructure projects under the ₹111-trillion National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) will be allowed on a digital platform to ensure access to updated project information for investments across various sectors, the finance ministry.

The projects will be mapped and evaluated by the departments concerned and the finance ministry to monitor the implementation and actual progress, compared to the initial estimates of the NIP for each project.

The move assumes significance as increased focus on infrastructure projects will help revive the economy following the covid-19 crisis.

National Infrastructure Pipeline for India:

This in line with the Prime Minister’s Independence day speech that Rs.100 lakh crore ($1.4 trillion) would be invested in infrastructure over the next five years.

Infrastructure is a key driver of the overall development of Indian economy. It is seen that investments in infrastructure equal to 1% of GDP will result in GDP growth of at least 2% as infrastructure has a “multiplier effect” on economic growth across sectors.

National Infrastructure Pipeline will ensure that infrastructure projects are adequately prepared and launched.

Infrastructure projects will include both social and economic infrastructure projects.

It would include greenfield and brownfield projects costing above Rs 100 crore each.

Each Ministry/Department would be responsible for the monitoring of projects so as to ensure their timely and within-cost implementation.

It will help in stepping-up annual infrastructure investment to achieve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $5 trillion by 2024-25.

In the past decade (2008-17), India invested about $1.1 trillion on infrastructure.

Why Infrastructure Development is necessary?

For a massive country such as India, improvement in infrastructure is a necessity. Target of 5 trillion economy.

Infrastructure development will generate growth, employment and pull people out of poverty. Infrastructure development will benefit Government’s Ease of Doing Business.

Developing Renewable Energy sector will help in mitigating climate. Infrastructure investments can also help improve peace and security by enabling, sustaining and enhancing societal living conditions.

About National Infrastructure Pipeline Dashboard:

Recently, Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs inaugurated the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) Online Dashboard through video conferencing.
The online dashboard is envisaged as a **one stop solution** for all stakeholders looking for **information on infrastructure projects** in New India. The dashboard is being hosted on the India Investment Grid (IIG).

IIG is an **interactive and dynamic online platform** that showcases updated & real-time investment opportunities in the country.

NIP is a first-of-its-kind initiative to provide world-class infrastructure across the country and **improve the quality of life for all citizens**.

NIP will improve project preparation, attract investments (both domestic & foreign) into infrastructure, and will be crucial for attaining the target of becoming a $5 trillion economy by FY 2025.

NIP covers **both economic and social infrastructure projects** based on the updated Harmonized Master List of Infrastructure.

**India Investment Grid:**

India Investment Grid (IIG), is an **interactive and dynamic online platform** to showcase the best of investment opportunities in India to the global investor community.

Developed and managed by Invest India, the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency, IIG serves as the **gateway to investments in India**, and is also widely used by Indian missions and embassies across the world. IIG allows investors to:

1. Search a pan-India database for investment opportunities across sectors
2. Track the progress of preferred projects and indicate interest
3. Directly communicate with project promoters

**Need for Private sector participation:**

Private sector participation in infrastructure delivery helps **deliver tangible benefits**, and there is anecdotal evidence to support this, even as the fiscal space remains constrained.

In highways, airports, ports and renewables, the private sector’s role has been landscape altering.

The private sector has also delivered efficiently—both on project execution (where land and clearances have not been a constraint) as well as operations.

Besides, **private participation enhances public accountability**. As consumers, we rarely hold public utilities to account for non-performance, and resort to coping solutions.

Yet, when a public private partnership (PPP) contract is awarded, we tend to **demand better services right away**.

**Way Forward:**

1. Private sector plays a **proactive role** in collaboration basis and partnership mission mode.
2. Design of infrastructure projects is the first and foremost important part to take of the all projects.
3. **Primary construction of the projects** should be done in Indian rupees and once it completed, it should be offered for international currencies.

Investments in India should focus on sector-specific investor targeting and development of new partnerships to enable sustainable investments in India.

In addition to a core team that focuses on sustainable investments, Invest India also partners with substantial investment promotion agencies and multilateral organizations.

**UPSC IAS ESSAY WRITING CHALLENGES**

Write an essay on the following topics in *not* more than 1000-1200 words:

i. “New Education Policy 2020: A Progressive Policy with Diverse Challenges”

ii. “Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value”

   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1NIUmjtvII&list=PL7Ga7_sc-ojUKom9QkzYNFZ2e6lO4tE_w&index=30

iii. “Life without liberty is like a body without spirit.”

   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-39TSZMP4I&list=PL7Ga7_sc-ojUKom9QkzYNFZ2e6lO4tE_w&index=31

iv. “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

v. “The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal”