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1. The enduring relevance of Nehru’s legacy

• Country that believed that India should be more friendly with the bloc led by the US because that bloc claimed to be pro-democracy. Among those who thought on these lines were leaders like Dr. Ambedkar.

• **Distance from two camps**: The foreign policy of independent India vigorously pursued the dream of a peaceful world by advocating the policy of non-alignment, by reducing Cold war tensions, and by contributing human resources to the UN peacekeeping operations.

• India wanted to keep away from the military alliances led by US and Soviet Union against each other.

**Introduction:**

Four men embodied the **vision of free India** in the 1940s — Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Ambedkar. Gandhi’s moral rectitude, allied to Jawaharlal Nehru’s political passion, fashioned both the strategy and tactics for the struggle against British rule.

Sardar Patel’s firm hand on the administration integrated the nation and established peace and stability.

Ambedkar’s erudition and legal acumen helped translate the dreams of a generation into a working legal document that laid the foundations for an enduring democracy.
Setting the way by Tactics and Philosophy:

1. When the world was disintegrating into fascism, violence, and war, Gandhi taught the virtues of truth, non-violence, and peace.

2. While the nation reeled from bloodshed and communal carnage, Ambedkar preached the values of constitutionalism and the rule of law.

3. While parochial ambitions threatened national unity, Patel led the nation to a vision of unity and common purpose.

4. While mobs marched the streets baying for revenge, Nehru’s humane and non-sectarian vision inspired India to yearn again for the glory that had once been hers.

5. Of the four, Gandhi and Nehru stood out. Despite differences over both tactics (Nehru wanted Independence immediately whereas Gandhi believed Indians had to be made ready for their own freedom) and philosophy (the agnostic Nehru had little patience for the Mahatma’s spirituality), the two men proved a formidable combination.

6. Gandhi guided Nehru to his political pinnacle; Nehru in turn proved an inspirational campaigner as President of the Indian National Congress, electrifying the nation with his speeches and tireless travel.

Four principal pillars of Nehru’s legacy to India:

1. Democratic institution-building,

2. Staunch pan-Indian secularism,

3. Socialist economics at home, and

4. A foreign policy of non-alignment,

all of which were integral to a vision of Indianness that is fundamentally challenged today.

- Of these, it is the edifice of democracy that Nehru constructed that remains the most indispensable pillar of his contributions to India.

- It was by no means axiomatic that a country like India, riven by so many internal differences and diversities, beset by acute poverty and torn apart by Partition, would be or remain democratic.

- Many developing countries found themselves turning in the opposite direction soon after Independence, arguing that a firm hand was necessary to promote national unity and guide development.
With Gandhi’s death, Nehru could have very well assumed unlimited power within the county. And yet, he himself was such a convinced democrat, profoundly wary of the risks of autocracy, that, at the crest of his rise, he authored an anonymous article warning Indians of the dangers of giving dictatorial temptations to Jawaharlal Nehru.

**Nehru’s Democratic methods: A deference to the system:**

1. As Prime Minister, Nehru carefully nurtured the country’s infant democratic institutions.
2. Nehru wrote regular letters to the Chief Ministers of the States, explaining his policies and seeking their feedback.
3. He subjected himself and his government to cross-examination in Parliament by the small, fractious but undoubtedly talented Opposition, allowing them an importance out of all proportion to their numerical strength, because he was convinced that a strong Opposition was essential for a healthy democracy.
4. Nehru took care not to interfere with the judicial system; on the one occasion that he publicly criticised a judge, he apologised the next day and wrote an abject letter to the Chief Justice, regretting having slighted the judiciary.
5. Nehru never forgot that he derived his authority from the people of India; not only was he astonishingly accessible for a person in his position, but he started the practice of offering a daily darshan at home for an hour each morning to anyone coming in off the street without an appointment, a practice that continued until the dictates of security finally overcame the populism of his successors.
6. The five principal pillars of Nehru’s legacy to India — Nation-building, Democratic institution-building, Secularism, Democratic Socialist economics, and a Novel foreign policy (Non-alignment, Panchsheel) still form the cardinal values of India.

As India nears its 75th anniversary of Independence from the British Raj, a transformation still incomplete, has taken place that, in its essentials, has changed the basic Nehruvian assumptions of postcolonial nationhood.

Nehru himself, as a man with an open and questing mind, would have allowed his practical thinking to evolve with the times, even while remaining anchored to his core beliefs.

**Conclusion: A plural society** has much to learn from Nehru’s record. Critical engagement with his record is a must. An India sans Nehru’s legacy of democratic values stands to lose far more than it will gain.
It was Nehru who, by his scrupulous regard for both the form and the substance of democracy, instilled democratic habits in our country.

His respect for Parliament, his regard for the independence of the judiciary, his courtesy to those of different political convictions, his commitment to free elections, and his deference to institutions over individuals, all left us a precious legacy of freedom.

The American editor, Norman Cousins, once asked Nehru what he hoped his legacy to India would be.

“Four hundred million people capable of governing themselves,” Nehru replied.

The numbers have grown, but the very fact that each day over a billion Indians govern themselves in a pluralist democracy is testimony to the deeds and words of the man whose birthday we commemorate tomorrow.

2. India needs a policy solution for the problem of radicalisation

Context:

The recent arrest of multiple suspects in the ISI terror module case shows that the threat of radicalisation in India is pervasive and increasing exponentially.

A month before these arrests, a different ISIS module was busted by the National Investigation Agency.

The module was found to have a pan-India presence, stretching across Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala.
In both cases, investigations have gone on to reveal that **online radicalisation** played an important role in the **recruitment of members** as well as the **preparation and/or execution** of extremist activities by the members.

**Definition of Radicalisation:**
Radicalisation is a process in which an **individual or group adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations.** It rejects or undermine the status quo or contemporary ideas and expressions of the nation.

Recent rise of ISIS and its penetration across Asia is an example of such a radicalisation.

At the same time, it must be understood that radicalisation by itself is not bad and gains a positive or negative characteristic based upon its context.

A mere deviation from conventional thinking must not be penalised.

**Radicalisation in India:**

1. The problem of radicalisation in India is well past its primary stages and has **entered a second stage with more defined characteristics.**

2. We have enough evidence from reports of various investigative agencies across the country that the process is now **subtle, systematic, organised, programmed and structured.**

3. **Children face particular vulnerabilities** as a result of armed violence such as orphanhood, psychological damage.

4. They also face a threat of recruitment as young soldiers. These factors often lead to a disruption to education, and thereby the reduction of a child’s capacity to recover from poverty.

5. **Women are affected in many ways** in the event of violence. Sexual violence, recruitment as combatants and an expanded economic/household role, which is often transferred onto young girls.

6. **Using resources for conflict-related purposes** means that public expenditures on social services decrease. These impacts spending on social causes like education, health etc.

7. So far, the Indian state’s response has been **characteristically security-centric** ranging from prevention of violent extremism, unlawful activities and terrorist acts by strengthening intelligence apparatus or through brute force or holding talks and initiating programmes aimed at the cessation of violence.
8. However, it seems that these responses have come too late. It is pertinent to develop strategies before violence becomes the leitmotif of radicalisation.

**Government Measures to combat Radicalisation:**

The Ministry of Home Affairs had set up the **Counter-Terrorism and Counter Radicalisation division** in November 2017.

It can be gathered from the latest document on work allocation, that the focus of the division is largely on the implementation and administration of counter-terror laws and monitoring of fundamentalist organisations such as the Students Islamic Movement of India, Popular Front of India, Jamaat-e-Islami and Sanatan Sanstha.

The division was originally mandated with the task of developing policies and strategies to counter-radicalisation.

This should have been one of the major tasks of the agency. Yet, as per the document, the task of developing an **action plan for counter-radicalisation** and deradicalisation only forms a single point in a list of nearly 59 other tasks that the division is currently required to perform.

**Need to define Radicalisation for whole world:**

1. There is also a need to develop a definition of radicalisation that suits the needs of such an action plan and is tailored to our particular context.

2. This will allow the state to develop programmes and strategies to effectively combat such radical ideas, thereby addressing the problem of radically motivated violence.

3. The definition of radicalisation would also help provide clarity as regards the purpose of implementation of the Action Plan.

4. In SCO speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi identified radicalisation as the greatest threat to the security and safety of all member countries.

5. Asked the member countries to heed the challenges and build effective responses. Such responses can broadly be classified under the following heads — deradicalisation, counter-radicalisation, anti-radicalisation and disengagement.

6. In line with this vision, India must lead by example and develop responses systematically with due regard to constitutional values.
Way Ahead measures:

1. The Indian state should develop and enforce de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation and anti-radicalisation strategies at a pan-India and pan-ideology level on a war footing.

2. Such attempts must be informed by the fact that the battle against radicalisation begins in the minds and hearts much before it manifests in terms of violence.

3. Any programme aimed at deterring or reversing radicalisation must focus on the ideological commitment that enables the violence, rather than the violence or the justification of violence itself.

4. Efforts must be made to first stem the flow of propaganda from across the Indian borders.

5. Second, a uniform statutory or policy framework to deal with radicalisation, de-radicalisation and its associated strategies should be developed.

6. Third, arrested and convicted individuals must not only be prosecuted and punished as a measure of deterrence or retribution but their reformation and rehabilitation must also be prioritised.

7. Fourth, counter-radicalisation strategies involving the rehabilitation, re-education and reintegration of those undergoing radicalisation must be developed and implemented.

8. Fifth, anti-radicalisation measures aimed at the prevention of radicalisation must be executed.

9. The last measure should include the promotion of the syncretic nature of religions in India through the development of counter-narratives, promotion of constitutional values and virtues, promotion of sports and other activities in schools and other educational institutions aimed at mainstreaming the youth.

Conclusion:

Radicalisation is a danger to internal security and polarises the Indian society deepening the sectarian differences.

Thus it is imperative to fight radicalisation on all fronts. A pragmatic and responsible civil society can ensure that Indian cultural harmony remains intact. Social security measures, speedy justice for poor can go a long way in strengthening it.

Radicalisation becomes problematic only where it has the propensity to lead to violence.

The challenge lies in preventing such radicalisation. Developing a nuanced understanding of the process of radicalisation as well as its characteristics can help guide the Action Plan in effectively meeting such challenges.
3. Fertility rate falls to below replacement level, signals population is stabilizing

Context:
According to the latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) released by the Union Health Ministry, coming on the back of a sustained family planning programme spanning decades, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), or the average number of children per woman, has declined further from 2.2 reported in 2015-16 to 2.0 at the all-India level.

According to the United Nations’ population division, countries experiencing below-replacement fertility — lower than 2.1 children per woman — indicates that a generation is not producing enough children to replace itself, eventually leading to an outright reduction in population.

The data in NFHS 2019-21, the fifth in the survey series, shows the fertility rate at 1.6 per cent in urban areas and 2.1 in rural India.

About Total Fertility Rate (TFR):
TFR indicates the average number of children expected to be born to a woman during her reproductive span of 15-49 years.

The replacement level is the number of children needed to replace the parents, after accounting for fatalities, skewed sex ratio, infant mortality, etc. Population starts falling below this level.

**TFR of 2.1 is something a country wants to achieve:**

1. Director at International Institute for Population Sciences, which is the designated nodal agency to conduct NFHS-5, told that a **TFR of 2 is a “definite indicator” of stability of population in the long term in the country.**

2. “The number means two parents are replacing two children. In the long run, we will have a potential growth rate of zero. It is not immediate.

3. A TFR of 2.1 is something a country wants to achieve. That way it is a very huge development because of maternal and child health improvement.

4. Top public health experts highlighted **three key pointers from the TFR declining to 2:** a diminished challenge to development, the importance of investing in public health and education with skills, and the **need to focus on environmental protection.**

5. **The country has been aiming for a TFR of 2.1.** A fall to 2 means we have achieved our goal of population stabilization.

6. This means we will possibly still become the most populous country in the world — it was expected somewhere **between 2024-2028** — but it will now be delayed.

7. It essentially means that we need not worry about a very large population being a challenge to our development.

8. The numbers also tell us that we have **stabilised the growth of human resources.**

9. The younger population profile for the next 2-3 decades will **provide an opportunity for accelerated economic growth.**

10. But continuing to have a young population for 2-3 decades, along **with population stabilization**, should give us a **great opportunity for accelerated development** — provided we **invest in public health and education with skills.**

11. Importantly, we can no longer say that due to population growth, there is strain on our natural resources. Now if we are stabilising the population, there is really no excuse for neglecting the environment.
Area-specific approach needs to adopt:

1. According to the survey, there are **five states with TFR above 2**: Bihar (3), Meghalaya (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.4), Jharkhand (2.3) and Manipur (2.2).

2. Two states reported TFR at the same level as the national average: Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Two states have a TFR of 1.6: West Bengal and Maharashtra.

3. Six states have a TFR of 1.7: Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Tripura.

4. Six more states have a TFR of 1.8: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. And five states have a TFR of 1.9: Haryana, Assam, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Mizoram.

5. The latest data also show **significant progress on several indicators** related to fertility, family planning, age at marriage and women’s empowerment — all of which have **contributed to the decrease in TFR**.

**Population stability findings:**

NFHS-5 finds that there has been a significant increase in current use of any modern contraceptive method, which stands at 56.5 per cent in 2019-21 against 47.8 per cent in 2015-16. The share of condoms is 9.5 per cent against 5.6 per cent in 2015-16.

However, the uptake of female sterilisation has gone up to 38 per cent against 36 per cent in 2015-16.

The uptake of injectable contraceptives, introduced in 2017, remains abysmally low at 0.6 per cent.

The **increase in female sterilisation** shows that the onus of family planning remains with women, with men not participating in the process and “shrugging responsibility”.

**Way Forward:**

1. The Government must adopt a **targeted social and behavior-change communication strategy** to ensure that men also take responsibility for family planning.

2. But the **increased use of modern contraception** also means that the total unmet need for family planning, which has been a major issue in the past, has come down to 9.4 per cent in 2019-21 against 12.9 per cent in 2015-16.

3. It is **less than 10 per cent** for all states except Jharkhand (12 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (13 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (13 per cent).
4. India needs to focus on some areas which are socially, culturally, economically depressed.

5. Identification of 140 high focused districts is the right step by the government in this direction. However, it needs to work in the whole of Bihar, U.P., Madhya Pradesh and Assam.

6. The quality of care in family planning has shown significant improvement with 62 per cent of current users reporting that they received information on side effects from service providers.

7. This has increased from 46 per cent in the last survey. The number of women who have a bank account they operate themselves has increased significantly from 53 per cent in 2015-16 to 79 percent.

8. Decentralized policies targeted at states such as Bihar, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, which require special focus to lower the fertility levels, can be implemented on a priority basis.

Conclusion:

India needs to invest more in the health sector. India invests only 1.3% of its GDP. The family planning budget is only 4% of the entire health budget and within that India spends only 1.5% on birth spacing methods.

We need to invest heavily in human capital, health and education for a healthy and productive population that can add to national and global accomplishments of the country.

Task shifting and empowering primary health centre personnel with resources to carry out a sustained result-driven campaign to help spread the message of family planning techniques and benefits of a smaller family, along with quality investments in female education, could help India attain uniform fertility levels across all states at a faster pace.
1. A vital cog in Bongaigaon’s response to malnutrition

**Context:**

*Project Sampoorna* which was successfully implemented in Bongaigaon district of Assam is a model that can be easily implemented anywhere in reducing child malnutrition.

This is in line with the [UN SDG goals](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/) and [Kuposhan Mukta Bharat initiative](https://www.nhdm.gov.in/) of India. The project has resulted in the reduction of malnutrition in children using near zero economic investment.

Initiatives like these are needed to **tackle the vicious cycle of malnutrition**.

**Addressing child nutrition:**

The highest risk factor for **high risk pregnancy is anaemia** which is usually **nutritional**.

The **vicious cycle of a malnourished child**:

Growing into an unhealthy adolescent, and then further into an anaemic pregnant young woman giving birth to an asphyxiated low birth weight baby;
This baby then facing possible developmental delays, only to grow into a malnourished child; and this child who struggles further for nutrition and appropriate care while the world around her barely makes ends meet is the one that sucks in all possibilities of a healthy society.

This portrays the worst-case scenarios, but truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

In order to break out of this vicious cycle, the **low-hanging fruit had to be targeted: children’s nutrition.**

**About Project Sampoorna:**

Sampoorna is in tandem with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and those set by the UN Secretary General in the Food Systems Summit (September 2021) including the need to have **food systems and social protection** that support resilience and food security.

PM Modi also had identified health and nutrition as priority areas and reiterated the need for a ‘Kuposhan mukt Bharat’ (Malnutrition Free India) while launching the Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN Abhiyaan) (National Nutrition Mission) in 2017-18.

**Acting as an interlink:**

1. The project has resulted in the reduction of malnutrition in children using **near zero economic investment.**

2. It was during Poshan Maah (Nutrition Month) in September 2020 that 2,416 children were identified to be **malnourished in the lush green Brahmaputra valley** district of Bongaigaon.

3. The National Family Health Survey (NHFS)-5 has documented that the number of children under five who are stunted, wasted, underweight and the number of anaemic women and children in the district are higher than the national average — **anaemia being a major determinant of maternal and child health.**

4. These were corroborated by Project Saubhagya that was designed to reduce the maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate of the district.

5. A real time data sheet is updated by field-level doctors as and when a high risk pregnancy is identified, which is then followed up till safe delivery.
**Case study: Malnutrition, patriarchy:**

Bongaigaon has 1,116 Anganwadis with a total of 63,041 children below five.

1. The massive exercise of plotting their weights and heights in World Health Organization growth charts revealed a total of 2,416 malnourished children; 246 cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and 2,170 instances of Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM).

2. **District Nutritional Rehabilitation Centres, or NRCs**, usually have up to 20 beds; and a monthly intake of 200 SAM children is not practical.

3. Based on the success of the community-based COVID-19 management model (*Project Mili Juli*), we launched *Project Sampoorna* targeting the mothers of SAM/MAM children, the tagline being *Empowered Mothers, Healthy Children*.

4. In addition, we identified the mother of a healthy child of the same Anganwadi Centre (AWC) and paired her with the target mother; they would be *Buddy Mothers* (2,416 pairs).

5. They were usually neighbours and shared similar socio-economic backgrounds. The pairs were given diet charts to indicate the daily food intake of their children; they would have discussions about this on all Tuesdays at the AWC. Local practices related to nutrition would also be discussed.

6. The **major hindrance to the project was patriarchy**. Mothers had to be empowered financially for sustained results.

7. Therefore, they were enrolled in **Self Help Groups (SHGs)** under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

8. By the end of three months, 74.3% of mothers were enrolled in SHGs; by the end of six months, enrollment went up to 75.6% and by the end of a year, it was 90%.

9. Meanwhile, **local government** arranged for 100 millilitres of milk and an egg on alternate days for all 2,416 children for the first three months, giving time for their mothers to stabilise themselves in the newly found jobs.

10. The large-hearted people of Bongaigaon adopted Anganwadis and filled the tiny stomachs with the much needed proteins and their hearts with love.

**New guidelines of POSHAN 2.0:**

1. POSHAN scheme focuses on the 1,000 days between a mother’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday.
2. Prioritizing women and girls, and addressing their nutritional deficiencies through fortification and provision of take-home rations.

3. The introduction of **community-based programmes for tackling severe acute malnutrition.**

4. The guidelines now **place accountability at the district level** with nutrition indicators included in the KPIs (key performance indicators) of DN/DC.

5. **POSHAN tracker:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a **new software tool** called the POSHAN Tracker.

6. The **aim is to streamline the supply side of the scheme.** This will replace the earlier ICDS CAS, because the data generated by it was not usable.

**Conclusion:**

**Project Sampoorna** had prevented at least 1,200 children from becoming malnourished over the last year.

The **National Nutrition Mission** and the State government recognised our project in the ‘**Innovation Category**’.

The Chief Minister of Assam, has written an encouraging message for the project report which will be released soon.

The model can easily be implemented anywhere in the world. We believe children everywhere have the **right to stay healthy**, and hope that the vicious cycle is broken sooner rather than later.

‘**Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food**’. This statement is often attributed to Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, and quite literally sums up **Project Sampoorna** which was conceptualised and successfully implemented in Bongaigaon district of Assam.

**2. In pursuit of social justice**

![Early Childhood Education: Learning in the Formative Years](image)
Context:
The recently launched educational programme of the Tamil Nadu government, Illam Thedi Kalvi (Education at the Doorsteps), triggered mixed reactions. Government argued that “This programme will brighten the future of lakhs of students and will last for a hundred years.”

Reasons for launching the Illam Thedi Kalvi (Education at the Doorsteps):
The Tamil Nadu government launched this programme as it recognises the pandemic-induced gap in learning among schoolchildren. The lockdown disempowered children from the marginalized sections as they did not have access to technology-driven pedagogical methods as the privileged did. Many who find online teaching convenient and safe fail to recognize this class bias. The expensive nature of online teaching pushed a large number of underprivileged children out of the education system. The lockdown thus accentuated the asymmetrical structure of the school system.

Provisions of the Indian Constitution on education:
1. The British colonial government introduced India’s modern education system.
2. From Macaulay minute to Wood’s dispatch to several commissions like Sadler commission, 1904 Indian education policy etc., has built the foundation for the Indian education system during the colonial period.
3. Article 45 in Directive Principles of State Policy stated that the government should provide free and compulsory education to all until the age of 14 within 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution.
4. Since it was not realized, Article 21A was introduced by the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002.
5. It made elementary education a fundamental right rather than a directive principle.
6. Article 45 was amended to provide for early childhood care and education to children below the age of 6 years.

Learning outcomes: A cause of concern:
1. Though Tamil Nadu is among the most literate States, learning outcomes in have been a cause of concern.
2. Nearly 59% of Class 5 students and 89% of Class 3 students were unable to read a Class 2-level textbook in rural Tamil Nadu, according to the Annual Status of Educational Report (2018).
3. Tamil Nadu got the lowest score among the southern States in ‘learning outcomes and quality’ in the Performance Grading Index of the Union Education Ministry.

4. Keeping these facts in mind, volunteers of this programme intend to improve learning outcomes.

5. The idea is to do this outside school hours and away from the school premises in a comfortable and easily accessible location close to the child’s home.

6. The volunteers will teach an estimated 34.05 lakh children in the 5-13 age group in 93,000 neighbourhoods for 60 to 90 minutes between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

7. Volunteers who have completed Class 12 will impart lessons for children of Classes 1-5 and graduates will teach children from Classes 6-8.

8. They will refer to textbooks prepared by the State textbook council. Creative pedagogical initiatives including activity-based learning will ensure positive outcomes.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic of Learning:
Technology Gap: The lockdown disempowered children from the marginalized sections as they did not have access to technology-driven pedagogical methods as the privileged did. Many who find online teaching convenient and safe fail to recognize this class bias.
Economic Disparity: The expensive nature of online teaching pushed a large number of underprivileged children out of the education system.
Deepering Structural Asymmetrical: The lockdown accentuated the asymmetrical structure of the school system.

Unavailability of Various government incentives: Many govt. incentives including free textbooks, free uniforms, free bicycles and nutritious mid-day meals, were unavailable to children of vulnerable sections during the lockdown.

Objectives of the programme:
1. Many incentives provided by the state, including free textbooks, free uniforms, free bicycles and nutritious mid-day meals, were unavailable to children of vulnerable sections during the lockdown.

2. Their parents’ loss of livelihood compelled these children to drop out of school and resulted in increasing cases of child labour.

3. This crisis steadily began to wreck a celebrated political value in Tamil Nadu and an enduring legacy of the Dravidian movement — social justice.

4. Launching this programme is the government’s attempt to achieve social justice.
5. This policy will be implemented by volunteers first in 12 districts. It will be launched in other districts when the results from the 12 districts are positive. Some 68,000 of the 86,000 volunteers are women.

6. This is quite encouraging as it could allay fears about the safety of female students and encourage them to participate in the programme.

7. Otherwise, many may be compelled to become child labourers or domestic help.

8. Allotting ₹200 crore for the programme is a welcome move especially since the Union government slashed the total education budget this year.

NITI Aayog Report: Suggested Measures:
1. School education, especially, the preschool level, should be more inclusive. In our school-level learning process, no one should be left behind or have disadvantage.

2. The NITI Aayog Report 2021 proposed interventions in key areas:
   a. focus on academic reforms,
   b. strengthening human capacity,
   c. strengthening administrative systems, driving accountability and
   d. creating a shared vision for change.

3. States should prepare a Learning Outcome Framework (LOF) to resolve the gap between learning outcome and the GER issue.

4. The report also highlighted the need to simplify the assessment process and the need for learning enhancement programmes.

5. States need to implement remediation in campaign mode for 4-5 years to bring all children to grade-level.

Towards Paulo Freire’s vision:
1. It is commendable that experienced teachers and civic and education department officials will be monitoring the progress of the students at the district and block levels.

2. By providing a concrete role to school management committees and community development activists, the programme is turning learning into a social engagement.

3. The fact that a volunteer who has completed Class 12 becomes an instructor will challenge the inherent power dynamics between teachers and students.

4. When young volunteers impart lessons creatively in an unconventional atmosphere, the possibility of better learning outcomes is higher.
5. This also gives children an opportunity to develop a critical understanding of their social reality.

6. This will enhance their self-respect and help them probe the reasons for oppression and injustice. This programme is an example of Paulo Freire’s vision through ‘conscientization’.

Conclusion:
Some of the critics argue that there is a possibility of communal elements using the programme for their own interests. However, this well-thought-out programme will prevent regressive political elements from usurping it.
But having said that, there should be strong and credible institutional mechanisms to prevent any violation of girl children’s dignity as classes are going to be conducted outside the school premises by volunteers whose antecedents are not fully known to the parents and children. Though the large participation of women volunteers will dispel this fear, critiques could use this point to dent the programme’s success.

3. More a private sector primer than health-care pathway

Context:
Towards this, NITI Aayog recently published a road map document entitled “Health Insurance for India’s Missing Middle”.

Figure 4: Number of individuals eligible or covered, by health insurance scheme type
However, to say the least, the report confounds all hopes and expectations of a credible pathway to universal health coverage (UHC) for India. The report brings out the gaps in the health insurance coverage across the Indian population and offers solutions to address the situation.

**Indian Health sector:**

1. Low Government expenditure on health has constrained the capacity and quality of healthcare services in the public sector.
2. At least 30% of the population, or 40 crore individuals – called the missing middle in this report – are devoid of any financial protection for health.
3. In the absence of a low-cost health insurance product, the missing middle remains uncovered despite the ability to pay nominal premiums.
4. Covering the left out segment of the population, commonly termed the ‘missing middle’ sandwiched between the poor and the affluent, has been discussed by the Government recently.

“Health Insurance for India’s Missing Middle” report:

The report proposes voluntary, contributory health insurance dispensed mainly by private commercial health insurers as the prime instrument for extending health insurance to the ‘missing middle’.

**Government subsidies**, if any at all, will be reserved for the very poor within the ‘missing middle’ and only at a later stage of development of voluntary contributory insurance.

This is a major swerve from the vision espoused by the high-level expert group on UHC a decade ago, which was sceptical about such a health insurance model as the instrument of UHC and advocated a largely tax-financed health system albeit with private sector participation.

**Out-patient care needs to be addressed:**

1. An even more untenable case has been made with respect to out-patient department (OPD) care insurance coverage, which includes doctor consultations, diagnostics, medicines, etc.
2. The report rightly acknowledges that OPD expenses comprise the largest share of out-of-pocket expenditure on health care, and concomitantly have a greater role in impoverishment of families due to health-care expenses.
3. The report proposes an OPD insurance with an insured sum of ₹5,000 per family per annum, and again uses average per capita OPD spending to justify the ability to pay.

4. However, the OPD insurance is envisaged on a subscription basis, which means that insured families would need to pay nearly the entire insured sum in advance to obtain the benefits. This is the last thing one would equate with UHC.

5. Clearly, this route is unlikely to result in any significant reduction of out-of-pocket expenditure on OPD care, which beats the whole purpose of providing insurance.

6. Any cost savings or benefits that accrue would be due to using low-powered physician payment modes and a more integrated and coordinated pathway of care.

7. However, their contribution is likely to be nominal and at least be partly offset by the administrative costs involved in insurance.

8. Individuals are likely to be largely indifferent to such an OPD insurance scheme, particularly if it restricts choice of health-care providers.

Health Insurance for India’s Missing Middle: Recommendations:

Report has recommended three models for increasing the health insurance coverage in the country.

1. The first model focuses on increasing consumer awareness of health insurance.

2. The second model is about “developing a modified, standardized health insurance product” like ‘Arogya Sanjeevani’, a standardised health insurance product launched by the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India (IRDAI) in April 2020.

3. A “slightly modified version” of the standardised Arogya Sanjeevani insurance product will help increase the update amongst the missing middle.

4. The third model expands government subsidized health insurance through the PMJAY scheme to a wider set of beneficiaries.

5. This model can be utilized for segments of the missing middle which remain uncovered, due to limited ability to pay for the voluntary contributory models outlined above.

6. This is the only model out of three proposed which has fiscal implications for the Government.

7. Though this model assures coverage of the poorer segments on the missing middle population, premature expansion of PMJAY can overburden the scheme.

8. The report is more about expanding the footprints and penetration of the private health insurance sector.
9. Further, the report looks to attain the elusive UHC with few or no fiscal implications for the Government, which is an absurd idea by any stretch of the imagination. Such a disposition is highly dismaying in the aftermath of COVID-19.

**In-patient care also needs government support:**

1. Those with even a rudimentary understanding of health policy would know that no country has ever achieved UHC by relying predominantly on private sources of financing health care.

2. Evidence shows that in developing countries such as India, with a gargantuan informal sector, contributory health insurance is not the best way forward and can be replete with problems.

3. But even when we look at international precedents of contributory social health insurance models, some very important traits stand out, for example, significant levels of government subsidy to schemes; not-for-profit mode of operation; and some important guarantees for health.

4. The NITI report sweepingly ignores these fundamental precepts.
   a. For hospitalisation insurance, the report proposes a model similar to the Arogya Sanjeevani scheme, albeit with lower projected premiums of around ₹4,000-₹6,000 per family per annum (for a sum insured of ₹5 lakh for a family of five).

5. There would be a standard benefit package for all, and the insured sum will be between ₹5,00,000 and ₹10,00,000.

6. Insurance will be dispensed largely by commercial insurers who would compete among themselves.

**Conclusion:**

The report has also suggested sharing of the government scheme data with the private insurance companies.

Government databases such as National Food Security Act (NFSA), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, or the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) for agricultural households can be shared with private insurers after taking consent from these households, suggesting an outreach strategy.
The **National Health Policy 2017** envisaged increasing public health spending to 2.5% of GDP by **2025**. Let us not contradict ourselves so early and at this crucial juncture of an unprecedented pandemic.

**4. Seeds of hope: On farm laws repeal**

Context:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the **repeal of the three contentious farm laws**.

Farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, have been protesting against these laws at the borders of Delhi since November 26 last year.

PM Modi has done the right thing by announcing the **repeal of the three farm laws** that are at the centre of a protracted confrontation between his government and a section of farmers for a year.

**What were the farm laws that have been repealed?**

1. The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, which is **aimed** at allowing trade in agricultural produce outside the existing APMC (Agricultural Produce Market Committee) mandis;
   a. It seeks to **create an ecosystem** where the farmers and traders enjoy the freedom of choice relating to sale and purchase of farmers’ produce.
b. The reform grants freedom to farmers and buyers to transact in agricultural commodities even outside notified APMC mandis ensuring competitive alternative trading channels to promote efficient, transparent and barrier-free interstate and intra-state trade.

2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, which seeks to provide a framework for contract farming;
   a. It seeks to provide for a national framework on contract farming that protects and empowers farmers in their engagement with agri-business firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters or large retailers for farm services and sale of future farming produce at a mutually agreed remunerative price in a fair and transparent manner.

3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020, which is aimed at removing commodities such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potato from the list of essential commodities.
   a. It seeks to remove commodities like cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from the list of essential commodities.
   b. The reform ends the era of frequent imposition of stock-holding limits except under extraordinary circumstances.

How farmers managed to sustain farm law protest for a year?

It is being called the longest agrarian movement in independent India. The agitation against the three farm laws passed in September 2020 started in Punjab, but gradually spread to the neighbouring state of Haryana and parts of Uttar Pradesh.

But it caught the eyeballs of the nation only when farmers marched to the Delhi borders on November 26 last year.

Many thought they would return after registering their protest, but they set up a little township of sorts, weathering the cold winter and the searing summer.

But there was a method to this madness despite the multiplicity of unions and ideologies participating in the agitation.

What is the procedure to repeal a law in India?

1. The law can be repealed by the government in two ways;
   a. First to bring a Bill to repeal the three laws, and
b. Second is to promulgate an ordinance that will have to be consequently replaced with a Bill within six months.

2. According to the former Union Law Secretary P.K. Malhotra "For repeal, the power of Parliament is the same as enacting a law under the Constitution."

3. **Article 245 of the Indian Constitution** empowers the Parliament to enact as well as to repeal any law.

4. That is, the Parliament has the power to make laws and also to repeal them through the Repealing and Amendment Act. In 1950, the first Act was passed and 72 Acts were repealed.

5. In 2019, Repealing and Amendment provision was invoked when Union Government **scraped 58 obsolete laws** and made minor amendments to the Income Tax Act, 1961 and also the Indian Institutes of Management Act, 2017.

6. Narendra Modi led government already **scraped or repealed around 1,428 Acts during its first term.**

7. Like any other Bill, the Repealing and Amendment Bill will pass in the same way as any other Bill. It will have to be passed by both Houses of Parliament and the President's assent will be required to make it a law.

**Government arguments at that time of introducing the laws:**

The laws sought to **reorganise India’s agriculture sector** more in accordance with the principles of market economy.

They would have **redesigned the country’s food procurement and distribution mechanisms**, triggering fears that the producers and consumers would be **adversely affected**, to the benefit of big companies.

Such fears were aggravated by the **undemocratic manner** in which these laws were brought about, through ordinances, and passed in Parliament without deliberations, or consultations with the States.

**MSP foul play:**

1. This **monotonous cycle of wheat and rice** should anyway be broken as it is not sustainable. It is making our soil devoid of nutrients and also depleting the water table.

2. Moreover, MSP as a practice should be done away with as the Food Corporation of India (FCI) incurs **huge losses on account of procurement and storage.**
3. Since MSP is only available in Punjab and Haryana, traders buy grains from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar at less than half the price and sell it to the government in Punjab and Haryana at MSP.

4. If you combine the total procurement and compare it to the land under cultivation, it comes out that the average yield per acre is much more than the actual yield possible. **This foul play has been going on for years.**

5. There is a **gap in prices of market and the MSP** because the grains are in abundance, as soon as the amount of grains is reduced, the prices will automatically go up.

6. Talking of the current standoff, the government has bent as required and now the farmers should also come to the discussion table as the demand to repeal all the laws is not wise and they have gained what was initially required.

7. This kind of protest was necessary to tell the current dispensation that their way of passing laws is not legitimate, which has been happening over the last few years.

8. If we see the origin of MSP, it came as an incentive to adopt new methods of green revolution. Now when the government wants farmers to shift to other crops, it should begin by giving incentives to the farmers for that.

**Major problems that need to address:**

1. Some major problems of farmers, and Indian agriculture in general, are that the yields are much lower than the global average, the economic condition of farmers is much worse and there is very little adoption of new technologies.

2. The major reason for this is the non-availability of free and open market to farmers, since the average landholding size is less than 1 hectare (2.4 acres).

3. So, the farmers are reluctant to buy new machinery and adopt latest methods and continue with traditional farming requiring large human labour.

4. This is evident from the fact that there is a **huge gap between the percentage of population engaged in agriculture** and percentage of contribution of GDP by the agriculture sector.

**How does the repeal impact the political economy of rural India?**

1. There may be some deficiencies in the exact design and mechanism of the reforms proposed in the three farm laws, but most advocates of agricultural reform would agree that they were in the right direction.

2. That the government chose to push these reforms through its own set of consultations left many stakeholders feeling left out, and created a backlash.
3. The repeal underlines that any future attempts to reform the rural agricultural economy would require a much wider consultation, not only for better design of reforms, but for wider acceptance.

4. The repeal would leave the government hesitant about pursuing these reforms in stealth mode again.

Conclusion:

It was a concern that the overall thrust of the farm laws appeared to encourage the participation of larger corporate players in agricultural markets rather than farmer-friendly organisations, such as cooperatives or Farmer Producer Companies (FPC).

Especially in the case of the amendment of the Essential Commodities Act, there was reasonable suspicion that a handful of corporate players were to substantially benefit from investments in logistics, storage and warehousing.

In bowing to public demand, Mr. Modi has shown flexibility and pragmatism.

Farmers should not only withdraw the protest now but also show a more flexible approach regarding the path ahead to reform the sector.

5. The need for a proper Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy

Introduction:

In recent times, there have been calls for more transparency and information regarding bills that are passed in parliament.

There has been strong criticism from some quarters over how little involvement and voice the general collective has in terms of what takes place in parliament.

This can quite clearly be seen in the recent protests against the farm bills wherein stakeholders, in this case the farmers, felt that they were not included enough in the discussion process that preceded the bill.
This however is **not an isolated case**, there have been numerous instances both in recent times and in the past wherein stakeholders have not been consulted adequately before the formulation of a policy.

This is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed as the active participation of citizens in the legislative process is very much central to the effective functioning of a democracy.

One commonly suggested way to bring this about would be **through a pre-legislative consultation policy.**

**Usage of Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy in recent times:**

The Union Government has listed **29 Bills** (26 new and three pending) to be tabled in the winter session of Parliament.

In 2014, the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy was adopted, mandating a host of rules, including that whenever the Government makes any law, it must place a **draft version of it in the public domain for at least 30 days.**

Since the inception of the policy, 227 of the 301 bills introduced in Parliament have been presented without any prior consultation.

Of the 74 placed in public domain for comment, at least 40 did not adhere to the 30-day deadline.

**What is the policy?**

1. **The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy (PLCP) 2014** mandates that whenever the Government makes any laws (bills, rules, regulations etc.), **it must place a draft version of it in the public domain for at least 30 days.**

2. The policy also says that along with the draft, a note explaining the law in simple language and justifying the proposal, its financial implication, impact on the environment and fundamental rights, a study on the social and financial costs of the bill, etc. should be uploaded.

3. The respective departments should also upload the summary of all the feedback that they receive on the circulated draft.

4. The PLCP was formulated based on the broad recommendations of the National Advisory Council headed by Sonia Gandhi (2013) and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002).

5. **It aimed to create an institutionalized space for public participation in lawmaking processes.**

**Why is it important?**

This policy provides a **forum for citizens and relevant stakeholders** to interact with the policymakers in the executive during the initial stages of lawmaking.

Protests in the recent past over laws such as the farm laws, the RTI Amendment Act, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, etc. have all highlighted that there is discontent
among relevant stakeholders and the public at large since they were not looped in while framing such laws. Public consultations enhance transparency, increase accountability and could result in the building of an informed Government where citizens are treated as partners and not as subjects. For example, concerns raised by civil society members (#SaveTheInternet campaign) were addressed by the Telecom Regulatory Authority in its framing of the net neutrality rules after extensive consultation and deliberation processes adopted by them.

**Empowerment through Pre legislative consultation policy:**

1. A Pre legislative consultation policy has numerous merits and can help nudge our country in the right direction.

2. Given how diverse this nation is, it is crucial that we have a means for citizens to get directly involved in the formulation of policy decisions, especially those that have a direct stake in the bill and its nature.

3. If we fail to do so we will risk falling behind the times. Countries like Britain and South Africa and even the state of Kerala already have already set up effective PLP processes.

4. If anything, Kerala’s effective model is proof of how effective this process can be at home.

5. Furthermore, this policy has the capacity to make historically marginalized groups feel more included and cared for.

**What is the status of its implementation?**

1. During the 16th Lok Sabha (May 2014 to May 2019) 186 bills were introduced in Parliament, of which 142 saw no consultation prior to introduction.

2. From the 44 bills placed in the public domain for receipt of comments, 24 did not adhere to the 30-day deadline.

3. During the 17th Lok Sabha (June 2019 to present), 115 bills were introduced in Parliament, of which 85 saw no consultation prior to introduction.

4. From the 30 bills placed in public domain for receipt of comment, 16 of them did not adhere to the 30-day deadline.

5. The tentative schedule for the winter session indicates that a total of 29 bills are listed for introduction and passing. Of these, 17 saw no prior consultation while from the 12 that were placed in the public domain, only six adhered to the 30-day deadline.

**Why is implementation difficult?**

Though it is required that the mandates of an approved policy be heeded by all Government departments, the absence of a statutory or constitutional right has watered down its effect.
The effective implementation of the policy requires subsequent amendments in executive procedural guidelines like the Manual of Parliamentary Procedures and Handbook on Writing Cabinet Notes.

However, during a subsequent amendment to the Manual of Parliamentary Procedures, the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs ignored the Ministry of Law and Justice when it requested them to incorporate PLCP provisions in the manual.

**Conclusion:**

**Incorporation of pre-legislative consultation** in the procedures of the Cabinet, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha etc. should be prioritized.

Similarly, it must be required of ministers while introducing the bill to place an **addendum note** on the details of the pre-legislative consultation.

Besides providing an overview of the needs for realizing the objectives of the legislation, the Legislative Impact Assessment can be a tool to act as a checklist for necessary support systems to implement the legislations.

It is the accountability and responsibility of the Parliament to ensure the effectiveness of the passed legislation.

On the sidelines of Australian practice where an institution outside the Parliament specifically performs the post enactment assessment of the passed law, similar institutions can be established in India.

**Empowering citizens with a right to participate in pre-legislative consultations** through a statutory and a constitutional commitment could be a gamechanger.

6. **India needs to sign up for life-course immunisation**
Introduction:

The importance of vaccines, which are considered to be among the most cost-effective public health interventions, has been recognised globally.

Yet, the full benefits of vaccines do not reach all children and other age groups.

There are wide inequities in vaccine coverage in children by geography, gender, parent’s education and family’s socio-economic status, and other stratifiers.

The coverage of most available vaccines in adults in India is sub-optimal.

The COVID-19 vaccination drive is an opportunity to take stock of the status of adult immunisation and the future ahead.

Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI):

1. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most people linked and associated vaccination with children only.

2. The fact is that vaccines, ever since the first vaccine against smallpox became available in 1798 had always been for a far wider age group, including for adults.

3. However, soon after smallpox eradication and the launch of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) across the world in the 1970s and in India in 1978 there were concerted efforts to increase vaccine use and coverage in children.

4. Scientifically, the benefit of most vaccines is greater if administered earlier in life infancy and childhood, a reason child are usually prioritised and vaccines recommended for every child.

5. For the remaining age groups including adults, vaccines are recommended for specific sub-groups such as older people or those with specific health conditions.

6. The COVID-19 vaccines are exceptions in some sense. These are the first vaccines which have been recommended for all adults, who have been given priority over children.

7. In fact, the jury is still out on whether, which age sub-group and when children should receive COVID-19 vaccines.

Need for adult vaccination:

1. Following the outbreaks of Japanese Encephalitis (JE) in 2005-06 — in the years that followed — India had conducted mass scale JE vaccination in the endemic districts, which included the adult age group.
2. Then, there had been a limited use of Swine Flu vaccines for health workers during the H1N1 (2009) pandemic in 2009-10.

3. Other than that, there has been limited focus on the systematic efforts for adult vaccination in India.

4. The first and only national vaccine policy of India, released in 2011, had no mention of adult vaccination.

5. The National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) in India, on a few occasions, discussed adult immunisation but stayed away from any recommendation for the general population except for the vaccination of health workers as high-risk groups, for hepatitis B vaccine, etc.

**About National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI):**

1. NTAGI is the highest advisory body on immunization in the country which consists of independent experts who provide recommendations on vaccines after reviewing data on disease burden, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of vaccines.

2. The mission of the Global NITAG Network is to enhance the ability of NITAGs to efficiently make evidence-informed recommendations on immunization through global collaboration and cooperation with input from regional networks.

3. The vision of NITAG is to provide an environment where each country, using the best practices and data available, makes sound, evidence-based recommendations on immunization that are most appropriate for their context in order to facilitate their adoption and implementation.

4. However, there is very limited data on the burden of vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs) in adult age groups — in most settings including India.

5. Lately, review of available data has pointed that the increased childhood vaccination coverage has resulted in proportionately higher cases of VPDs in the older age groups.

6. It is known that the burden of VPDs in adults (in comparison to children) is relatively low;

7. The larger adult population renders a greater social impact in terms of absenteeism from work (due to illnesses) and the associated costs of health care seeking and hospitalisation.

**Need of booster doses for various vaccines:**

1. There is emerging scientific evidence on waning immunity and the need of booster doses in the adult age group for the vaccines administered in childhood.
2. The vaccines which have become available in the last two decades (which adults had not received as children), have **potential to be beneficial**.

3. As an example, there are **more deaths due to pneumonia in adults** than in children.

4. A proportion of those illnesses, hospitalisations and deaths in all age groups can be prevented by increasing coverage of currently licensed vaccines which prevents pneumonia and related complications.

5. Fortunately, these vaccines have become **part of childhood vaccination programmes**; however, the coverage and benefits need to be expanded to the identified high-risk adult population.

6. The available evidence has resulted in the global stakeholders agreeing to ‘**the Immunization Agenda 2030**’ which has emphasised that countries should consider extending the benefit of vaccines to all age groups.

**An opportunity in hand:**

1. The COVID-19 vaccination drive has drawn our attention to the **possibilities of adult vaccination**, which should be **used effectively**.

2. The initiatives should be taken to educate public, health-care providers and members of professional associations about currently available vaccines for adult age groups.

3. This can help people to make an informed choice and healthcare providers **to share information with citizens**.

4. Various training programmes and graduate and postgraduate teaching curricula should be revised to have content on adult vaccination.

5. The current discourse should be used to plan and develop a **national adult vaccination strategy and road map for India**. It can be done through a few coordinated efforts.

**Vaccination policy for adults:**

The **childhood vaccination programme** is amongst the best performing government health programmes in India.

In COVID-19 vaccination, it was the government facilities which have delivered 93%- 95% of total vaccine shots.
The steps to take:

1. First, the mandate of NTAGI needs to be expanded to adult vaccination.
   a. NTAGI may start with a review of available scientific evidence and providing recommendations on adult vaccination in India.
   b. These recommendations can be regularly revisited and revised once additional data become available.
   c. A NTAGI sub-group on adult vaccination can also be constituted to facilitate the process.

2. Second, the VPD surveillance system and the capacity to record, report and analyse data on the disease burden and immunisation coverage need to be strengthened.
   a. The focus has to be on analysing immunisation coverage and VPD surveillance data by age and other related stratifiers.

3. Third, the capacity of research and academic institutions to conduct operational research including the cost benefit analysis and to guide evidence-informed decisions needs to be boosted.
   a. Such analysis and evidence can be used by NTAGI in decision making processes.

4. Fourth, the process for developing and drafting a road map, possibly India’s national adult vaccination policy and strategy should be initiated.
   a. Any such policy should factor-in the learnings and lessons from the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination drive as well.
   b. In fact, policy questions in need of the answers should be identified now, and the process to generate evidence started.
   c. Otherwise, we may be at risk of asking policy questions 10 years down the line which can be answered in a few years from now.

5. Fifth, on a more operational level, the shortage of life-saving rabies vaccine in India in 2019 is a reminder of the risk and vulnerability in vaccine supply.
   a. To ensure vaccine security and be future ready for adult vaccination, the existing public sector vaccine manufacturing units in India should be revived and more need to be set up.
Conclusion:

The COVID-19 vaccination is a reminder that the benefits of already licensed vaccines are yet to reach the adult population.

It is an opportunity for health policy makers in India to institutionalise mechanisms to examine the need, take policy decisions on adult vaccination and empower adult citizens to make informed choices on whether they wish to get currently available vaccines.

It is time to plan for and expand the benefits of vaccines, for all age groups as part of the Universal Immunization Programme Plus in India.

Drafting and developing a national adult vaccination policy and strategy for India could be one such concrete step in this direction.

7. ‘Go back to committees’ is the farm laws lesson

Context:

In the light of the horrendous experience of the Government over the farm laws, the present practice of not referring the Bills to committees should be reviewed.

Lok Sabha Speaker has spoken about strengthening the committee system in the recent presiding officers’ conference. One way of strengthening it is by getting all the important Bills examined by them.

The farmers had to wage a prolonged struggle because the systems of Parliament were bypassed by the Government.
A government elected by the people can function only in a democratic way. Other options are not available to it.

The farmers who sat at the Delhi border for 14 months, braving heat and cold and death and conducting themselves in the most democratic way, have once again proved that.

A missed step of referred bills to the committees:

In fact, available data shows that Bills are very rarely referred to the committees these days.

House rules have vested the discretion in the presiding officers in the matter of referring the Bills to committees.

No reasoned decisions of the presiding officers for not referring them are available. Since detailed examination of Bills by committees result in better laws, the presiding officers may, in public interest, refer all Bills to the committees with few exceptions.

Although the relevant rule is not happily worded, the intent is clear, namely, that the committee should examine all the important Bills.

Importance of Parliamentary committees in democracy:

The Parliamentary committees are established to study and deal with various matters that cannot be directly handled by the legislature due to their volume.

1. These committees act as a mini-parliament, as they have MPs representing different parties are elected into them through a system of the single transferable vote, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament.

2. They monitor the functioning of the executive branch and provide legislature with various policy input, playing an important role in Indian democracy.

3. It scrutinises the accounts and the report of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, thereby ensuring accountability of any misspending.

4. Parliamentary committees ensure executive accountability through scrutiny of public spending and various laws.

5. The Public Accounts Committee is concerned with the manner and results of spending public funds.

6. Although committee recommendations are not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations that took place and put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.
7. By virtue of **being closed-door** and away from the public eye, discussions in committee meetings are also **more collaborative**, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.

**Decreasing role of Parliamentary committees:**

1. In a parliamentary democracy, the bills of such significance are sent to parliamentary committees for closer scrutiny.

2. However, **71% of the bills** went to parliamentary committees between 2009 and 2014, and this **dipped to only 25%** between 2014 and 2019.

3. **Side-lining parliamentary committees** is increasingly becoming the norm in India. But, given the significance of the parliamentary committee system in democracy, it needs to be strengthened rather than rendered defunct.

4. Protection of farmers is an essential part of national interest. So, in any future legislation on farmers it is absolutely necessary to involve the systems of Parliament fully so that a balanced approach emerges.

5. We must not forget that the farm Bills were not referred to either the standing committee or a joint select committee of both Houses of Parliament as has been the practice earlier.

6. Other issues affecting the functioning of the committees are low attendance of MPs at meetings, too many ministries under a committee.

7. Norms not followed by most political parties while nominating MPs to committees and the constitution of DRSCs for a year leaves very little time for specialisations.

**Steps that need to take:**

1. These farm Bills should have been referred to the **standing committee on agriculture for a detailed scrutiny**. The committee could have held comprehensive discussions with the farmers.

2. They would have thus got an opportunity to present their views before the committee and Parliament.

3. In fact, their main complaint was that they were not consulted at any stage before the ordinances were issued.

4. **Radical changes** in the farm sector without having any kind of consultation with the farmers was nothing short of adventurous.
5. It is very surprising why important Bills which are coming before Parliament are not being referred to the committees.

6. The experience of centuries shows that scrutiny of Bills by the committees make better laws. The case of the farm laws holds an important lesson for this Government or any government.

7. According to the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), DRSCs should be periodically reviewed so that the committees which have outlived their utility can be replaced with new ones. For example:

8. Standing Committee on National Economy to provide analysis of the national economy with resources for advisory expertise, data gathering, and research facilities.

9. Standing Constitution Committee to scrutinize Constitutional Amendment Bills before they are introduced in Parliament.

Conclusion:

The prolonged non-violent agitation by the determined farmers and the final capitulation by a very powerful Government augur well for India’s democracy.

Although parliamentary and cabinet committees are not a part of the Constitution they ensure healthy democracy and governance through scrutiny and better policies. They enable the cabinet and Parliament to take difficult decisions.

A proper parliamentary scrutiny of pieces of legislation is the best guarantee that sectoral interest will not jeopardise basic national interest.

8. MPLADS, its suspension, and why it must go
Context:
The government suspended the Member of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) Scheme so that these funds would be available for its COVID-19 management efforts.

All Opposition parties have been unanimous in their criticism of the government’s recent move to suspend the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years, approved by the Cabinet.

Such political unanimity is not very common but does happen whenever self-interest is involved.

It must be said upfront that notwithstanding the fact that unilateral decision-making is inappropriate in a democracy, the decision to suspend MPLADS for two years is a good first step.

What is the MPLAD Scheme?

MPLAD is a central government scheme, under which MPs can recommend development programmes involving spending of Rs 5 crore every year in their respective constituencies.

MPs from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, including nominated ones, can do so.

States have their version of this scheme with varying amounts per MLA. Delhi has the highest allocation under MLALAD; each MLA can recommend works for up to Rs 10 crore each year.

In Punjab and Kerala, the amount is Rs 5 crore per MLA per year; in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, it is Rs 2 crore; in Uttar Pradesh, it was recently increased from Rs 2 crore to Rs 3 crore.

How does the scheme work?

1. The government transfers it directly to the respective local authorities. The legislators can only recommend works in their constituencies based on a set of guidelines.

2. For the MPLAD Scheme, the guidelines focus on the creation of durable community assets like roads, school buildings etc.

3. Recommendations for non-durable assets can be made only under limited circumstances. For example, last month, the government allowed use of MPLAD funds for the purchase of personal protection equipment, coronavirus testing kits etc.
4. The guidelines for use of MLALAD funds differ across states. For example, Delhi MLAs can recommend the operation of fogging machines (to contain dengue mosquitoes), installation of CCTV cameras etc.

5. After the legislators give the list of developmental works, they are executed by the district authorities as per the governments financial, technical and administrative rules.

Following reasons for MPLADs scheme should be abolished:

1. First, the scheme violates one of the cardinal principles, which though not specifically written down in the Constitution, actually permeates the entire Constitution: separation of powers.
   a. The argument that MPs only recommend projects, but the final choice and implementation rests with the district authorities is strange;
   b. There are hardly any authorities in the district who have the courage or the gumption to defy the wishes of an MP.

2. CAG’s observations: Second, implementation of the scheme has always left much to be desired.
   a. The details below, which are some of the observations made by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, in a report make it clear: Expenditure incurred by the executing agencies being less than amount booked.
   b. Utilisation of funds between 49 to 90% of the booked amount;

3. Though the scheme envisages that works under the scheme should be limited to asset creation, 549 of the 707 works test-checked (78%) of the works recommended were for improvement of existing assets;
   a. Wide variations in quantities executed against the quantities specified in the BOQ (Bills of Quantity) in 137 of the 707 works test-checked. Variations ranged from 16 to 2312%.

4. Use of lesser quantities of material than specified by contractors resulting in excess payments and sub-standard works; “no accountability for the expenditure in terms of the quality and quantities executed against specifications”;
   a. Delays in issuing work orders ranging from 5 to 387 days in 57% of the works against the requirement of issuing the work order within 45 days of the receipt of recommendation by the MP;

5. Extensions of time granted to contractors without following the correct procedure;
6. **Register of assets created**, as required under the scheme, **not maintained**, therefore location and existence of assets could not be verified;

**Examples: Cases of misuse:**

Reports of **underutilisation and misutilisation of MPLADS funds** continue to surface at regular intervals but there seems to have been no serious attempt to do anything about it till now.

There are innumerable instances of misuse of these funds; one prominent example is the construction of a fountain in the open space of an unauthorised settlement, or a jhuggi jhopdi colony, which did not have provision of drinking water.

The general belief in the settlement was that the contractor who bagged the contract to build the fountain was related to the local Member of Parliament.

**Gaps in utilisation of MPLAD Funds:**

1. There are **wide variations** in the utilisation of the MPLAD amount in various constituencies.

2. A **report published in IndiaSpend** has some very interesting insights based on data made available to it by the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.

3. 508 MPs (93.55%) did not, or could not, utilise the entire MPLADS amount from May 4, 2014 till December 10, 2018, in 4 years and 7 months.

4. Only 35 MPs of the Lok Sabha utilised the entire amount of MPLADS during this period;

5. Though ₹1,757 crore had been released for MPLADs, only ₹281 crore had been utilised by all the 543 MPs till May 15, 2015.

6. This means **only 16% of the money had been spent in one year** by all the MPs put together, because the Lok Sabha was constituted in May 2014; Since the MPLADS began in 1993, ₹5,000 crore was lying unspent with various district authorities by May 15, 2015.

7. It is clear from the details above, as well as later experience, that **most MPs use money under MPLADS quite haphazardly**, and a significant portion of it is left unspent.

8. Finally, we come back to the **legality or constitutionality issue** which was mentioned earlier.


10. The possibility that implementation of a lot of schemes bears **no relationship to how the schemes were intended to be implemented**, seems to have completely escaped the attention of the Court.
11. Common experience does not support this because of large, yawning gaps being found in actual implementation.

Conclusion:

The implementation of the scheme was marked by various shortcomings and lapses. These were indicative of the **failure of internal control mechanisms** in the department in terms of **non-maintenance of records**.

Therefore, the need of the hour is to **plug the loopholes** in the scheme and rechristened it to serve the developmental goals envisaged by the scheme.

The two-year suspension has given the government an opportunity to work in the direction of **making the scheme more people’s friendly**.

**9. Pegasus inquiry must reverse the ‘chilling effect’**
In recent, a Bench of the Court, led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), constituted a three-member independent expert committee to conduct an investigation (it will be overseen by a retired judge of the Court) and protect public faith in the constitutional system.

In the world over, this is the first-ever inquiry ordered by any Chief Justice with such wide-ranging terms into spying by Pegasus.

This initiative of the CJI will embolden civilians to question the suppression of rights and instil fear among rulers.

It should reverse the chilling effect. This dynamic order evoked positive responses while some wanted greater relief than what was prayed in the original PILs.

**Misuse of Pegasus spyware:**

1. It is startling to know that governments in India purchase very expensive Israeli software to bug the Opposition and suppress dissent.

2. The revelations about the misuse of Pegasus spyware have shaken the world and even India has felt its reverberations.

3. In 2019, WhatsApp accused the government of India of using Pegasus software to hack the phones of journalists, politicians and activists. However, it didn’t reveal any names.

4. However, in July 2021, it again came into the spotlight, when Paris-based media NPO and Amenity International published a list of Indians surveillance by the government.

5. The Government has stonewalled queries on the subject, has refused to order any probe, and even allowed a whole Parliament session to be washed away as a discussion on the subject was denied.

**A worrying silence from the government:**

1. The Union Government has been consistently silent on the question on whether it had or has invaded the privacy of hundreds of innocent non-accused citizens and what it has done with the collected ‘intelligence’.

2. It has a constitutional duty now to justify its defence of ‘national security’ before the Court-appointed inquiry committee or face politico-constitutional consequences.

3. The Court turned down the Government’s request to allow it to set up the inquiry committee, as the principles of natural justice will not permit the ‘accused’ to select his investigators.
4. The Bench has enough reasons to suspect that the Government is a party to this unconstitutional action (Pegasus).

5. It made it clear that allowing that request “would violate the settled judicial principle against bias, i.e., that ‘justice must not only be done, but also be seen to be done’.”

6. The use of the invasive spyware was noticed in May 2019 when WhatsApp claims that ‘Pegasus’ had infiltrated the devices of WhatsApp users;

**Injures freedom of speech:**

1. The Bench led by the CJI observed that surveillance injures the freedom of speech and results in fear based self-censorship.

2. When it relates to the freedom of the press, it results in a chilling effect on the basic civil right of freedom of speech.

3. Using the highly expensive software, Pegasus, is an assault on the vital public watchdog role of the press, which could undermine the ability of the press to provide accurate and reliable information which is needed for people to know about the acts of their elected government.

4. The potential technological power of Pegasus must be challenged. The Centre’s complacency is worse than its alleged involvement that needs to be probed.

5. In fact, the Court has faced criticism of ‘inaction’, giving a long rope to the Government, and refused to stay the notification issued by the West Bengal government, setting up an inquiry commission to investigate the revelations of the Pegasus Project.

6. The Delhi-based lawyer, even wrote that the Court should ask the Government to answer whether it ordered spying on citizens who are not accused of any crime.

7. **Budapest Convention on Cybercrime:** It is an international treaty that seeks to address Internet and computer crime (cybercrime) by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations. India is not a signatory to this convention.

**Privacy, a sacrosanct right declared by Supreme court:**

1. Though privacy was not a specifically guaranteed right earlier, unabated surveillance was never allowed.

2. The Supreme Court emphatically defined it in R. Rajagopal in 1994. With the landmark order in 2017 by the Supreme Court declaring that the right to privacy is as sacrosanct as human
existence and is inalienable to human dignity and autonomy, the burden to secure this right has also fallen on the top court.

3. Snooping can be justified only on three counts: the restriction must be by law; it must be necessary and only if other means are not available, and proportionate (only as much as needed); and

4. It must promote a legitimate state interest (e.g., national security), according to the nine-judge Bench judgment on privacy.

5. Without establishing this justification, the Government cannot use ‘national security’, in the case of Pegasus, as an empty or lame excuse, because surveillance directly infringes on the privacy right.

6. If the Government wants to justify the surveillance as authorised then it has to answer the question whether anybody has been prosecuted for terrorism with evidence procured by snooping.

7. The leaked list of phone numbers, which includes those of journalists, politicians and lawyers only raises the suspicion of abuse of surveillance power.

Conclusion:

Using criminal spyware is not only a mere violation of Part III rights but is also a serious blow to freedom of the press, expression of dissent by the Opposition, and fearlessness of lawyers to challenge in courts the unconstitutional actions of the state.

It undermines democracy and converts elected leaders into absolute dictators.

The Supreme Court committee and Bench has the onerous duty of resurrecting the constitutional scheme of rule of law.
10. Living on death row with illness

Introduction:
Prisoners are a neglected group in India. Indian prisons are traditionally overcrowded spaces, with little attention paid to concerns about health, comfort or privacy.

Those problems get even worse when talking about prisoners on the death row.

Deemed to not be worthy of living in the society, such prisoners often receive inhumane treatment that entirely ignores their needs.

Context:
Recently, Deathworthy: A Mental Health Perspective of the Death Penalty, an important report by Project 39A, based at the National Law University, Delhi, was published.

It explores the mental health concerns of death row prisoners, the intellectual disabilities they have, and the psychological impact of being on death row.

India remains among the 55 retentionist countries where the death penalty is still handed down for certain crimes.

Data on how many death row prisoners have mental health conditions and/or intellectual disabilities are hard to come by (because the prisoners are not specifically assessed for it) and so this report helps to improve our understanding of this much-neglected topic.
General information about Death penalty:

1. Capital punishment, also called the death penalty, is the execution of an offender sentenced to death after conviction by a court of law of a criminal offence.
2. It is the highest penalty awardable to an accused. Generally, it is awarded in extremely severe cases of murder, rapes, treason etc.
3. The death penalty is seen as the most suitable punishment and effective deterrent for the worst crimes. Those who oppose it, however, see it as inhumane.
4. Thus, the morality of the death penalty is debatable and many criminologists and socialists all across the globe, have been long demanding abolition of the death penalty.

However, Mental Health of prisoner before Death Penalty:

A Mental Health Perspective of the Death Penalty presents empirical data on mental illness and intellectual disability among death row prisoners in India and the psychological consequences of living on death row.

The report finds that an overwhelming majority of death row prisoners interviewed (62.2%) had a mental illness and 11% had intellectual disability.

One of the biggest groups that suffer the most, in that sense, are the children. Children have to often relocate, they have to stop going to school, they have to stay inside the house for months together till the story dries own.

Otherwise, they might be the subject of that fury. And in some cases, they’re not even told about the sentence.

The death penalty isn’t been restricted to that one individual. It has intergenerational impact on children and their future prospects.

No right to fair trial to Mentally disable prisoners:

1. Worryingly, nearly 11% of the recent death row prisoners were diagnosed with intellectual disabilities and most of them had deficits in intellectual functioning.
2. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights calls upon countries “not to impose the death penalty on a person suffering from any form of mental disorder or to execute any such person”.
3. Yet, the laws of most countries don’t explicitly prohibit this. Mental illness and intellectual disabilities complicate the death penalty.
4. Persons with mental illness and intellectual disabilities may not be able to instruct their lawyers to mount a robust defence, thus jeopardising the right to a fair trial enshrined in our Constitution.

5. The ‘insanity defence’ in the Indian Penal Code sets such a high barrier that it can’t be met in most cases.

6. Even when there is an obvious history of mental illness, courts in India are usually unwilling to consider the plea of insanity by defence lawyers.

7. In Shatrughan Chauhan v. Union of India (2014), the Supreme Court had said that mental illness should warrant the commutation of death sentence to life imprisonment.

8. Despite this, courts do not consider mental illness as a mitigating factor when imposing punishment.

9. The report also highlights another important and neglected aspect of mental illness: the social determinants of mental illness.

10. Mental illness is more common among the poor and those with mental illness are more likely to end up in poverty.

11. Those who have experienced childhood abuse are significantly more likely to experience mental illness in adulthood than those who did not.

12. The report provides an insight into the poverty, abuse, neglect and violence that mark the overwhelming majority of death row prisoners with mental illness.

13. It sheds light on the stigma, social ostracisation and grief of families of those sentenced to death.

Way Ahead: Adopting a psycho-social approach:

The authors argue that courts should take a psycho-social approach towards sentence mitigation using the framework recommended by the Supreme Court in Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980).

The apex court had laid down guidelines that courts should take into consideration before imposing the death penalty.

These include mental health issues such as “extreme mental or emotional disturbance” at the time of the incident and acting under “duress”.

A psycho-social approach will allow courts to take into account the life history of an individual and relate this to the mental state of the individual.
Conclusion:

The report says, “We have sentenced to death people, who, due to the nature of their disability, might very well be exempt from the death penalty altogether.”

Society, especially those in the criminal justice system, including legal and medical professionals, should mull over this.

Mental illness is not a crime. Those with mental illness are vulnerable to violation of their rights. We need to ask ourselves what purpose is served by executing people who have a mental illness or an intellectual disability. This report, one hopes, will trigger these discussions.

11. Lower judiciary and centralised recruitment debate
Context:

The central government is preparing to give a fresh push to the establishment of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS) on the lines of the central civil services.

Recently, Law Minister has called a meeting of state law ministers to discuss the AIJS and issues related to infrastructure in the lower judiciary.

The idea of centralised recruitment of judges has been debated in legal circles for decades, and remains contentious.

A Law Commission report (1987) recommended that India should have 50 judges per million population as against 10.50 judges (then).

Now, the figure has crossed 20 judges in terms of the sanctioned strength, but it’s nothing compared to the US or the UK: 107 and 51 judges per million people, respectively. Thus, AIJS envisages to bridge the underlying gap in judicial vaccines.

Why has the AIJS been proposed?

The idea of a centralised judicial service was first mooted in the Law Commission’s 1958 ‘Report on Reforms on Judicial Administration’.

The idea was to ensure an efficient subordinate judiciary, to address structural issues such as varying pay and remuneration across states, to fill vacancies faster, and to ensure standard training across states.

A statutory or constitutional body such as the UPSC to conduct a standard, centralised exam to recruit and train judges was discussed.

The idea was proposed again in the Law Commission Report of 1978, which discussed delays and arrears of cases in the lower courts.

In 2006, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in its 15th Report backed the idea of a pan-Indian judicial service, and also prepared a draft Bill.

Background: What is the judiciary’s view on the AIJS?

1. In 1992, the Supreme Court in All India Judges’ Assn. (1) v. Union of India directed the Centre to set up an AIJS.
2. In a 1993 review of the judgment, however, the court left the Centre at liberty to take the initiative on the issue.

3. In 2017, the Supreme Court took suo motu cognizance of the issue of appointment of district judges, and mooted a “Central Selection Mechanism”.

4. Senior advocate Arvind Datar, who was appointed amicus curiae by the court, circulated a concept note to all states in which he recommended conducting a common examination instead of separate state exams.

5. Based on the merit list, High Courts would then hold interviews and appoint judges. Submitted that this would not change the constitutional framework or take away the powers of the states or High Courts.

What is the proposed All India Judicial Service (AIJS)?

The AIJS is a reform push to centralise the recruitment of judges at the level of additional district judges and district judges for all states.

In the same way that the Union Public Service Commission conducts a central recruitment process and assigns successful candidates to cadres, judges of the lower judiciary are proposed to be recruited centrally and assigned to states.

According to the Government, the AIJS to be an ideal solution for equal representation of the marginalised and deprived sections of society.

How are district judges currently recruited?

Articles 233 and 234 of the Constitution of India deal with the appointment of district judges, and place it in the domain of the states.

The selection process is conducted by the State Public Service Commissions and the concerned High Court, since High Courts exercise jurisdiction over the subordinate judiciary in the state.

Panels of High Court judges interview candidates after the exam and select them for appointment.

All judges of the lower judiciary up to the level of district judge are selected through the Provincial Civil Services (Judicial) exam. PCS(J) is commonly referred to as the judicial services exam.

What is the opposition to the AIJS?

1. A centralised recruitment process is seen as an affront to federalism and an encroachment on the powers of states granted by the Constitution.
2. This is the main contention of several states, which have also argued that central recruitment would not be able to address the unique concerns that individual states may have.

3. **Language and representation**, for example, are key concerns highlighted by states.

4. **Judicial business** is conducted in **regional languages**, which could be affected by central recruitment.

5. Also, **reservations based on caste**, and even for rural candidates or linguistic minorities in the state, could be **diluted in a central test**, it has been argued.

6. The opposition is also based on the **constitutional concept of the separation of powers**.

7. A centralised recruitment process is seen as an **affront to federalism** and an encroachment on the powers of states granted by the Constitution.

8. A central test could give the executive a foot in the door for the appointment of district judges, and **dilute the say that High Courts have in the process**.

9. Additionally, legal experts have argued that the creation of AIJS will not address the **structural issues plaguing the lower judiciary**.

10. The issue of different scales of pay and remuneration has been addressed by the Supreme Court in the **1993 All India Judges Association case** by bringing in uniformity across states.

11. Experts argue that increasing pay across the board and ensuring that a **fraction of High Court judges are picked from the lower judiciary**, may help better than a central exam to attract quality talent.

**Why is the government seeking to revive the idea of AIJS?**

The government has targeted the **reform of lower judiciary** in its effort to improve India’s Ease of Doing Business ranking, as **efficient dispute resolution** is one of the key indices in determining the rank.

Officials have said that the **AIJS is a step in the direction of ensuring an efficient lower judiciary**.

The government has countered the opposition by states, saying that if a central mechanism can **work for administrative services**, IAS officers learn the language required for their cadre it can work for judicial services too.

**Conclusion:**

The idea of AIJS is being proposed in the backdrop of judicial reforms, especially to check **persisting vacancies in judiciary and pendency of cases**.
The establishment of AIJS is a positive step, but faces many constitutional and legal hurdles.

The insurmountable number of pending cases calls for establishment of a recruitment system that recruits efficient judges in large numbers for speedy dispensation of cases.

However, before AIJS gets into the legislative framework, there is a need to build consensus and take a decisive step towards the AIJS.

12. Charting a trade route after the MC12

Context:

The World Trade Organization (WTO)’s 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) is being convened in Geneva, Switzerland at the end of this month, a year-and-a-half after it was scheduled to be held in Kazakhstan.

The MC12 is being held at an important juncture when the global trade scenario is quite upbeat.
About World Trade Organization (WTO):

1. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.

2. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world’s trading nations and ratified in their parliaments.

3. The WTO’s goal is to help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers conduct their business.

4. The WTO Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body of the World Trade Organization.

5. This conference is attended by the Trade Ministers and other officials from the organization’s 164 members. So far from 1996, there have been 11 ministerial conferences.

6. WTO is a consensus-based, members-driven organization. The main advantage of this approach is that the decision taken is acceptable to all members.

7. Under the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO, the Ministerial Conference is to meet at least once every two years.

The outlook:

1. Recent WTO estimates show that global trade volumes could expand by almost 11% in 2021, and by nearly 5% in 2022, and could stabilise at a level higher than the pre-COVID-19 trend.

2. The buoyancy in trade volumes has played an important role in supporting growth in economies such as India where domestic demand has not yet picked up sufficiently.

3. Therefore, these favourable tidings provide an ideal setting for the Trade Ministers from the WTO member-states to revisit trade rules and to agree on a work programme for the organisation, which can help maintain the momentum in trade growth.

4. But above all, the MC12 needs to consider how in these good times for trade, the economically weaker countries “can secure a share in the growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development”, an objective that is mandated by the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.
Demands of technologies necessary: IPRs and vaccine issue:

1. From the very outset of the COVID-19 pandemic it had become clear that IPRs protected using the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are formidable barriers to ensuring equitable access to vaccines.

2. Pharmaceutical companies controlling the global markets have used monopoly rights granted by their IPRs to deny developing countries access to technologies and know-how, thus undermining the possibility of production of vaccines in these countries.

3. The involvement of developing countries in vaccine production could have increased supplies of affordable vaccines to the low-income countries.

4. Availability of vaccines remains a critical problem in these countries even after a year since the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine was administered.

5. Recent statistics show that until now, a mere 4.1% of the population in low-income countries have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

6. To remedy this situation, India and South Africa had tabled a proposal in the WTO in October 2020, for waiving enforcement of several forms of IPRs on “health products and technologies including diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, medical devices and their methods and means of manufacture” useful for COVID-19 treatment.

7. By doing so, barriers created by IPRs to timely access to affordable medical products could be removed.

8. This proposal, supported by nearly two-thirds of the organisation’s membership, was opposed by the developed countries batting for their corporates.

Fisheries, e-commerce:

Although discussions on fisheries subsidies have been hanging fire for a long time, there is considerable push for an early conclusion of an agreement to rein in these subsidies.

However, the current drafts on this issue are completely unbalanced as they do not provide the wherewithal to rein in large-scale commercial fishing that are depleting fish stocks the world over, and at the same time, are threatening the livelihoods of small fishermen in countries such as India.

In recent months, the proposal by the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G-20 members to introduce global minimum taxes on digital companies has made headlines.
But in the WTO, most of these countries have been investing their negotiating capital to facilitate the expansion of e-commerce firms. Discussions on e-commerce are being held in the WTO since 1998, after the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce wherein WTO members agreed to “continue their practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions”.

Fast forward to the discussions in 2021, and a key focus of the 1998 e-commerce work programme, namely “development needs of developing countries”, is entirely missing from the text document that is the basis for the current negotiations.

On the negotiating table are issues relating to the liberalisation of the goods and services trade, and of course guarantee for free flow of data across international boundaries, all aimed at facilitating expansion of businesses of e-commerce firms.

**Divisions over investment:**

Complementing the current focus of the WTO to promote the global interests of oligopolies is the initiative for the adoption of an investment facilitation agreement.

Inclusion of substantive provisions on investment in the WTO has been one of the more divisive issues.

In 2001, the Doha Ministerial Declaration had included a work programme on investment, but it was soon taken off the table as developing countries were opposed to its continuation because the discussions were geared to expanding the rights of foreign investors through a multilateral agreement on investment.

An investment facilitation has reintroduced the old agenda of concluding such an investment agreement.

The proponents have been careful not to load the agenda by seeking substantial commitments from the Government to promote the interests of foreign investors, but it should be clear even to the uninitiated that the ultimate objective is to bind host governments into a multilaterally agreed commitment to comprehensively protect investor interests.

**One-sided negotiations:**

Besides the bias in favour of global oligopolies, the current negotiating processes in the WTO are fundamentally flawed.

The negotiations on e-commerce and investment facilitation are being conducted not by a mandate given by the entire membership of the WTO in a transparent manner that are also consistent with the objectives of the WTO.
Instead, these negotiations owe their origins to the so-called “Joint Statement Initiatives” (JSI) in which a section of the membership has developed the agenda with a view to producing agreements in the WTO. This will then be offered to the rest of the membership on a “take-it-or-leave-it” basis.

This entire process is “detrimental to the very existence of a rule-based multilateral trading system under the WTO”, as India and South Africa have forcefully argued in a submission against the JSIs early this year.

Conclusion:

In response to this the WTO may say that free trade has been an important engine of growth for developing countries in Asia. Although there may be some short-term pain, it is worth it in the long run.

Also, the WTO has sought to give exemptions for developing countries; enabling in principle the idea developing countries should be allowed to limit imports more than developed countries.

13. Time for action: On the G20 summit and the global political economy

Context:

At their first in-person meeting in two years, leaders of the G20 did not shy away from re-engaging with the biggest issues facing the global community today, including the COVID-19 pandemic.
climate change, a major tax agreement, and steps to address concerns regarding global economic growth and stability.

**Regarding G-20:**

The G20 is an informal group of **19 countries and the European Union**, with representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world’s largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world’s population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.

The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

It does not have any permanent secretariat or headquarters.

**Issues that discussed:**

1. On coordinated efforts to mitigate the pandemic, the focus was on vaccine production and distribution, with assurances of support to WHO’s target of inoculating 40% or more of the global population against COVID-19 by 2021, and at least 70% by mid-2022.

2. The implicit assumption in this commitment by G20 leaders is that initiatives to boost the supply of vaccines in developing countries will succeed, and cooperation will help the world overcome supply and financing constraints.

3. On climate change, the Group leaders recommitted their nations to providing $100 billion a year toward adaptation, mitigation, and green technologies, focusing on the needs of developing countries.

4. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to have scored a victory in this regard as the post-summit communiqué commits the G20 to limiting global warming to 1.5°C and identified sustainable and responsible consumption and production as “critical enablers”.

**India will achieve net zero emissions by 2070, says PM Modi:**

1. India will achieve net zero emissions latest by 2070, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the COP26 summit in Glasgow.
2. Until this meet, India was the only major emitter that hadn’t committed to a timeline to achieve net zero, or a year by which it would ensure its net carbon dioxide emissions would be zero.

3. **By 2030** India will ensure **50% of its energy will be sourced from renewable energy sources.** India will reduce its carbon emissions until 2030 by a billion tonnes.

4. India will also reduce its emissions intensity per unit of GDP by less than 45%. India would also install 500 Gigawatt of renewable energy by 2030, a 50 gw increase from its existing targets, Prime Minister said.

5. In the spirit of climate justice, rich developed countries ought to be providing **at least $1 trillion in climate finance** to assist developing countries and those most vulnerable.

6. In contrast to India’s run-up to the COP where it had strongly resisted demands by developed countries to take on net zero targets.

7. Several delegations from the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union had called upon Indian officials in previous weeks to coax such an agreement out of India.

8. **Achieving net zero by 2050**, scientists say, is the world’s best shot at keeping temperatures from rising above 1.5C of Pre Industrial levels.

**Critical issues that need to be implement:**

1. An immediate leap into net zero may yet be avoided, and a core message at Glasgow would be that rich countries are yet to deliver on the promised $100 billion a year from 2020 to help poor nations adapt to climate change; but India’s case can be strengthened only with a clear plan for a **multi-sectoral energy transition.**

2. There is little evidence, for instance, that the **indirect carbon tax** in the form of very high levies on automotive fuels has been earmarked for a **big green push** through **affordable electric mobility**, or even a **financial dividend to all citizens** to mitigate inflationary price effects on essential consumption.

3. As national scientific advisers have argued in a joint statement on the eve of the UN climate conference and to which India’s Principal Scientific Adviser is a signatory, it is essential for governments to draw up **precise technological, socio-economic, and financial policies** and requirements to demonstrate a **commitment to the 1.5°C goal.**

4. The country must seize the moment and present convincing plans that will be rolled out in the present decade in order to **attract climate finance**, even while buttressing the argument for a **medium-term window to taper down carbon emissions.**
5. If severe floods, droughts and more frequent storms erode the assets of citizens, governments of the future will have to pay for lack of foresight today.

Adaptation strategy by India:

1. The difference between climate change mitigation strategies and climate change adaptation is that mitigation is aimed at tackling the causes and minimising the possible impacts of climate change, whereas adaptation looks at how to reduce the negative effects it has and how to take advantage of any opportunities that arise.

2. Where mitigation strategies fail to reach emissions containment targets, climate resilience will be key to lessen the impacts of climate change and pave the way for our survival, along with the rest of the Earth's inhabitants.

3. We must make adaptation a core part of our development policies and projects. Various projects in India such as ‘Nal se Jal’, Clean Ujjawala, and Clean India Mission have not only offered adaptation benefits to our citizens in need but have also enhanced their quality of life.

Conclusion:

The G20 meeting has come at a critical moment for the global political economy. If it results in timely, effective, coordinated action across major nations, hope for recovery will remain afloat.

India has clearly put the ball in the court of the developed world. This is real climate action.

Now, India demands $1 trillion of climate finance as soon as possible and will monitor not just climate action, but deliver climate finance.

Most importantly, India has called, once again, for a change in lifestyles. If we cannot fix how we live, we cannot fix how we live on this planet.
1. RBI is right, need to move with caution on cryptocurrencies

Context:

1. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor is absolutely right in saying we need some more debate and discussion before cryptocurrencies are adopted in India.

2. Prime Minister warned that bitcoin presents a risk to younger generations, sounding a hawkish tone as his government prepares to introduce legislation to regulate cryptocurrencies.

3. PM Modi framed virtual money, which is highly popular in India and exists beyond state and central bank control as a domain that needs to be closely policed.

4. It is important that all democratic nations work together on this and ensure it does not end up in the wrong hands, which can spoil our youths.

5. Critics of cryptocurrencies allege that largely anonymous unregulated transfers make them a perfect tool for drug traffickers, people smugglers or money laundering.
6. Several countries have begun to legislate to introduce oversight over cryptocurrencies, and exchanges in many jurisdictions are now subject to the same regulations as other financial service providers.

7. India effectively outlawed crypto transactions in 2018, only for the country's top court to strike down the ban two years later.

8. That led to a boom in the sector as the country's vast young population took heed of an advertising blitz by Bollywood and cricket stars.

9. There have been growing calls for India to issue another ban, but Modi's government appears set to stop short, preferring instead strict legislation that could be passed before the end of the year.

10. Reserve Bank of India chief has been sharply critical, saying that cryptocurrencies are a serious threat to the financial system if not properly regulated.

About cryptocurrency:

A cryptocurrency is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange wherein individual coin ownership records are stored in a ledger existing in a form of a computerized database. It uses strong cryptography to secure transaction records, to control the creation of additional coins, and to verify the transfer of coin ownership.

It typically does not exist in physical form (like paper money) and is typically not issued by a central authority. Cryptocurrencies typically use decentralized control as opposed to centralized digital currency and central banking systems.

Distributed ledger technology (DLT) and Block Chain technology:

1. Distributed ledger technology (DLT) is a digital system for recording the transaction of assets in which the transactions and their details are recorded in multiple places at the same time.

2. Unlike traditional databases, distributed ledgers have no central data store or administration functionality.

3. Whether distributed ledger technologies, such as blockchain, will revolutionize how governments, institutions and industries work is an open question.

4. Blockchain technology is a specific kind of DLT that came to prominence after Bitcoin, a cryptocurrency that used it, became popular.
5. **Cryptocurrencies** such as Bitcoin use codes to encrypt transactions and stack them up in blocks, creating **Blockchains**. It is the use of codes that differentiates cryptocurrencies from other virtual currencies.

**RBI Concerns regarding cryptocurrencies:**

1. The RBI is primarily concerned about cryptocurrencies for its potential threat to the Indian rupee.
2. If a large number of investors invest in digital coins rather than rupee-based savings like provident fund, the demand of the latter will fall. This will **hamper the ability of banks to lend out money to its customers.**
3. Moreover, since cryptocurrencies are unregulated in the country and are difficult to trace, the government will also not be able to tax the amount, posing a threat to rupee.
4. On top of that, cryptocurrencies can be **used in money laundering and illegal activities.**
5. Crypto investors, for all these reasons, are in turn susceptible to hacking, scams, and losses as crypto coins are volatile in nature.
6. The RBI has repeatedly reiterated its **strong views against cryptocurrencies** since it gained popularity in India following a sudden boom in Bitcoin prices.
7. The central bank’s argument is that cryptocurrencies **pose serious threats to the macroeconomic and financial stability** of the country.
8. The RBI also doubted the number of investors trading on them as well their claimed market value.
9. RBI governor had reiterated his views against allowing cryptocurrencies saying they are a **serious threat to any financial system** since they are **unregulated by central banks.**

**What is the main appeal of a crypto currency technology?**

1. Central to the appeal and functionality of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is blockchain technology, which is used to **keep an online ledger** of all the transactions that have ever been conducted.
2. Thus, **providing a data structure** for this ledger that is quite secure and is shared and agreed upon by the entire network of an individual node, or computer **maintaining a copy of the ledger**.
3. Depending on what form cryptocurrencies take on in India, there could be an adverse impact on monetary policy, possibly **on the currency and fiscal stability.**
4. While an outright ban would probably deprive the country of a promising technological avenue and may also foster an illegal market.

5. We need a top-class regulatory framework to ensure private cryptocurrencies do not end up becoming a fertile ground for nefarious activity like drug trafficking, terror financing or money laundering.

**Regulation is priority:**

1. Regulation is needed to prevent serious problems, to ensure that cryptocurrencies are not misused, and to protect unsuspecting investors from excessive market volatility and possible scams.

2. The regulation needs to be clear, transparent, coherent and animated by a vision of what it seeks to achieve.

3. Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain technology can reignite the entrepreneurial wave in India’s start up ecosystem and create job opportunities across different levels, from blockchain developers to designers, project managers, business analysts, promoters and marketers.

**India’s unclear stance need to be addressed:**

1. While the Supreme Court’s decision to quash the restrictions on banks dealing with cryptocurrency entities has been a telling sign that authorities are not completely against digital tokens or blockchain technology, many young investors are bracing for potential restrictions.

2. They cite the lack of proper regulations in India as a deterrent in the country’s path to adopting digital tokens for wider use.

3. The Indian Parliament is currently working on a cryptocurrency bill, though it’s still unclear when it will be heard or what its contents will be.

4. Much of Indian authorities’ scepticism stems from the fact that a worldwide boom in cryptocurrency has bred the ground for fake trading platforms, often leading to fraudulent activities.

5. Some teenagers have already strategized how to protect their investments from a sudden ban, for example, by holding multiple trading accounts in domestic, as well as foreign exchanges.
There is a need of recognize the rise in popularity of cryptocurrency and then introduce **safeguard, measures and regulatory structure** by which people do not feel that they should have something to fall back on.

**Conclusion:**

India is currently on the cusp of the **next phase of digital revolution** and has the **potential to channel its human capital, expertise and resources into this revolution**, and emerge as one of the winners of this wave. All that is needed to do is to **get the policymaking right**.

**Blockchain and crypto assets** will be an **integral part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution**, Indians shouldn’t be made to simply bypass it.

**RBI’s objective** is to understand the magnitude of the impact trading in cryptos could have on financial markets, not to thwart the advent of new technologies nor choke innovation.

To be sure, there is no immediate demand to give cryptocurrencies the status of a digital currency; in other words, they are not becoming legal tender.

Media reports say the government is **planning to legalise trading in cryptos as assets on exchanges**.

2. What are the two initiatives of the RBI that PM Modi launched
Context:
In recent, Prime Minister Modi launched two customer-centric initiatives of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — the RBI Retail Direct Scheme and the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme.

With this, India has opened up the government bond market for retail investors.
RBI has been leveraging technology & innovation for enhancing the efficiency of its services.
RBI’s developmental role is focused on further deepening of financial inclusion and undertaking people centric initiatives. RBI called it as a “major structural reform” and further deepening financial inclusion.

Both, the RBI Retail Direct Scheme and the Reserve Bank – Integrated Ombudsman Scheme will aid in expanding the scope of investment in India while making access to capital markets easier and more secure.

Government securities Background:

1. A G-Sec is a tradable instrument issued by the Central Government or the State Governments. It acknowledges the Government’s debt obligation.
2. G- Secs carry practically no risk of default and, hence, are called risk-free gilt-edged instruments.
3. Gilt-edged securities are high-grade investment bonds offered by governments and large corporations as a means of borrowing funds.
4. Such securities are short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year- presently issued in three tenors, namely, 91 day, 182 day and 364 day) or long term (usually called Government bonds or dated securities with original maturity of one year or more).
5. In India, the Central Government issues both treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the State Governments issue only bonds or dated securities, which are called the State Development Loans (SDLs).
6. The g-sec market is dominated by institutional investors such as banks, mutual funds, and insurance companies. These entities trade in lot sizes of Rs. 5 crore or more.
7. So, there is no liquidity in the secondary market for small investors who would want to trade in smaller lot sizes.
What exactly are these two schemes about?

RBI Retail Direct Scheme:

1. The scheme allows **retail investors to buy and sell government securities (G-Sec) online**, both in the **primary and secondary markets**.
2. According to details provided by RBI, these **small investors can now invest in G-Secs by opening a gilt securities account** with the RBI. The account opened will be called **Retail Direct Gilt (RDG) Account**.
3. **Participation and allotment of securities** will be as per the non-competitive scheme. Only one bid per security is permitted.
4. On submission of the bid, the total amount payable will be displayed. Payment to the aggregator/receiving office can be made through using the net-banking or UPI facility from the linked bank account, whereby funds will be debited at the time of submission of bids on the portal.
5. **Registered investors** can access the **secondary market transaction** link on the online portal to buy or sell government securities through NDS-OM.

RBI Integrated Ombudsman Scheme:

1. This will help in **improving the grievance redress mechanism** for resolving customer complaints against RBI’s regulated entities.
2. According to the PMO, the scheme is based on **“One Nation-One Ombudsman”** with **one portal, one email, and one address** for the customers to lodge their complaints.
3. Customers will be able to file complaints, submit documents, track status, and give feedback through a single email address.
4. Now, there will be a **single point of reference for customers** to file their complaints, submit the documents, track status, and provide feedback.
5. Under this scheme, there will be a multilingual toll-free number that will provide all relevant information on grievance redress and assistance for filing complaints.
6. The redressal will continue to be cost-free for customers of banks and members of the public.
7. The existing ombudsman schemes are being **integrated into a single scheme** which will offer the benefit of a single platform to customers for getting speedy resolution of their grievances.
8. **This integrated scheme will reinforce confidence and trust in the financial system.**
Importance of the schemes:

1. The move comes at a time when rising inflation adds pressure on the RBI to lift rates.
2. Tighter monetary policy is likely to weaken the demand for bonds, making it challenging for the government to execute its near-record borrowing program.
3. Other emerging-market nations in Asia, like the Philippines, have also sought to raise funds from citizens to battle the pandemic.
4. Yields on India’s benchmark 10-year government bonds have risen in the past five months amid surging crude oil prices.
5. They eased in November after the government cut tax on retail fuels.
6. This structural reform will place India in the select league of nations such as the USA and Brazil which have such facilities.
7. India will possibly be the one among the first in Asia to allow direct retail investment in G-secs to open up an additional investment avenue.
8. Allowing direct retail participation in the G-Sec market will promote financialization of a vast pool of domestic savings and could be a game-changer in India’s investment market.

Conclusion:

The first scheme, namely the Retail Direct Scheme seeks to widen the investor base for government securities by creating an ecosystem whereby retail investors can easily participate in the government securities market which is so far dominated by institutional investors.

By doing so, India is setting an example in democratisation of the government securities market.

The other scheme, the Integrated Ombudsman Scheme focuses on strengthening the grievance redress mechanism for consumers of various services provided by the RBI regulated entities like Banks, NBFCs and payment system operators.

As stated by the RBI, launching of these two citizen centric initiatives will provide further impetus to our journey towards a more inclusive and responsive financial system.
3. Pointers that India is witnessing a K-shaped recovery

Introduction:
There has been great chatter about a V-shaped recovery for quite a while, ever since the first lockdown following the novel coronavirus pandemic.

There has been great discussions and speculations about the economic recovery for quite a while, ever since the pandemic.

However, experts are divided on the type where for some it is more K-shaped than V-shaped, with various groups and industries recovering much quicker than others.

It is also corroborated by the fact that the pandemic distinctly affected different sectors.

**About V-shaped recovery of an economy:**
A V-shaped recovery is characterized by quick and effective recovery in measures of economic performance after an acute decline in the economy.

There is undeniably some type of recovery, but one can hardly label it V-shaped. The economic ravages of the pandemic have had an uneven impact on different socio-economic groups.

The recovery we see today is more K-shaped than V-shaped, with various groups and industries recovering much more rapidly than their counterparts.
K-shaped recovery: Signs from industry:

1. Government taxation policies continue to be regressive, with increased indirect taxes and lower direct taxes placing greater tax incidence on the destitute.

2. The effects of this K-shaped recovery can be observed through the growth and consumption in specific industries.

Example:

1. Two-wheelers represent the economic situation of the lower and middle-class groups and India’s small businesses.

2. A report by analytical company CRISIL indicates that in the year 2021, two-wheeler sales are set to decline by 3%-6% year-over-year. This is on top of a lower base in the year 2020 already affected by the pandemic.

3. The actual decline of two-wheeler sales from pre-pandemic times on account of the base effect must be much more significant. The sales of two-wheelers are the second-lowest it has been in seven years.

4. It is imperative to note that entry-level models are the ones most affected under the category of two-wheelers.

5. The festival season was said to rectify this phenomenon, but it had been unable to.

6. On the other hand, premium cars and premium motorcycles have been resistant to the pandemic slowdown.

Post-covid: Impact on jobs, NREGA:

1. Over five million or 50 lakh people lost their jobs in October, according to a Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report.

2. Many of those who lost their jobs during this period are likely economically insecure and abstain from non-essential purchases.

3. This, paired with the astronomically high food and fuel prices, delivers a deadly blow pushing families to poverty.

4. Additionally, it is prudent to look at Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) figures as it acts as a proxy for the informal sector, which employs a large portion of Indians.

5. In the year 2021-2022, the Government of India had cut its budget allocation towards MGNREGA by 34%. There is a greater demand now for MGNREGA jobs than in the pre-COVID-19 era.
6. The lower Budget allocation accounts for the inability to compensate workers in time and fairly.

7. A portion of the Budget this year is spent on paying the liabilities for the previous financial year.

8. Those looking for MGNREGA work cannot afford to be unpaid for such long durations. This again ties back to placing upward pressure on unemployment figures.

**Rising Indirect Taxes: Impact of taxation:**

Moreover, the *usurious taxation policy* of the Government, which insists on *maintaining* indirect taxes on fuel and consumer products while *lowering* corporate taxes, paints a picture explaining these figures.

The Government had recently raised *taxes on textile products* from 5% to 12%.

While inflation soars, the incomes of the middle and lower-middle-class have at best remained constant.

There is tremendous pressure on the *financial stability of these households*, which seemingly face a sustained loss in disposable income.

Besides, the figures representing those who are employed only partially explain this phenomenon.

**Stimulus and growth should be Inclusive in nature:**

1. There seems to be no surprise that the consumption of two-wheelers and other such products has taken a significant hit.

2. The U.S. and European economies have *stimulated the economy* bottom-up through unemployment cheques and social welfare schemes.

3. The economist, John Maynard Keynes, popularized the concept of the *money multiplier* and the relationship between government stimulus and economic growth.

4. It fundamentally makes great sense to prioritize those who are more likely to spend (the middle and lower-middle-class) rather than those who have a *greater propensity to save*.

5. The velocity of money which sustained a significant shock from pandemic lockdowns needs to be kickstarted.

6. Furthermore, the *inflation of asset prices* over the recovery period helps determine the nature of this recovery.
7. The recovery in the stock market and other such financial assets over the past year has been phenomenal.

8. However, it is essential to understand that this does not necessarily reflect the economy’s condition as observed previously.

9. Less than 5% of India invest in equities, which means that less than 5% of India directly benefited from said recovery.

10. The lower middle class, which does not invest in such assets for many reasons, has no guard against inflation. Their only hedge against inflation is their income which makes for a poor one.

Way Ahead: Think welfare schemes

Therefore, as discussed before, their financial situation is worsened due to the rising prices of essential goods.

Moreover, the disproportional benefit of the asset price inflation favoring the upper-middle-class further displays the inherent K-shape of the recovery.

It is crucial that the Government addresses this phenomenon and works towards aiding the middle and lower-middle class.

Social welfare schemes must be given greater importance to assist households to get through this period.

A seemingly viable solution is for the Government to increase progressive (direct) taxes and reduce regressive (indirect) taxes to ease the financial pressure on lower-income households.

Conclusion:

India’s economic recovery after the ebbing of the second COVID-19 wave remains uneven, despite an uptick in several economic indicators.

The Indian economy is in a vicious cycle of low growth and higher inflation unless policy action ensures higher demand and growth.

In the absence of policy interventions, India will continue on the path of a K-shaped recovery where large corporates with low debt will prosper at the cost of small and medium sectors. This means lower employment as most of the jobs are created by the latter.
4. How is Facebook embedding the real world in computing?

Context:
Recently, Facebook CEO announced the rebranding of his company to Meta. The change, said in a post, has been brought about “to reflect who we are and the future we hope to build”. Facebook, the social media platform, will, however, keep its name.

What is the future it is hoping to build?
It is called metaverse. Metaverse is what the Facebook founder calls “an embodied internet”. It is where “you’re in the experience, not just looking at it”. Mr. Zuckerberg gave a glimpse of the metaverse through a demo video. It shows him being called in to join his friends playing cards in a virtual space.

Metaverse, for him, marks an evolution of how people connect with each other: “We’ve gone from desktop to web to mobile; from text to photos to video. But this isn’t the end of the line.”

What is Decentraland?
It is a virtual world where the visitors can perform various activities like watching concerts, visiting art galleries and gambling in casinos. The plots of lands are also being sold which are worth 100s of thousands of dollars in MANA (cryptocurrency).

Examples of metaverse:
1. In today's world there is a lot that goes on virtually. NFTs or Non-Fungible tokens can be considered an example of metaverse already. Even cryptocurrencies are one of them. However it is still far from the complete metaverse experience which would actually mean living lives on the internet.

2. As per Zuckerberg’s description, the metaverse is an “embodied internet, where instead of just viewing content you are in it.”

3. In order to access the metaverse, Facebook would require the biometric data such as eye scans, voice recordings, pulse rates, etc.

4. All of this information would then be collected by Facebook Inc. This data would then be used to build the multiverse.
Is metaverse exclusive to Meta?

1. Metaverse is a **virtual environment** that will lend itself to **immersive experiences**.
2. It means, according to Mr. Zuckerberg, “having a shared sense of space and not just looking at a grid of faces”.
3. “**Metaverse**”, coined by science fiction writer **Neal Stephenson** in his 1992 novel Snow Crash, has a lot more romantic appeal. Writers have a habit of recognising trends in need of naming:
4. “**cyberspace**” comes from a 1982 book by William Gibson; “robot” is from a 1920 play by Karel Capek.
5. Recent neologisms such as “the cloud” or the “Internet of Things” have stuck with us precisely because they are handy ways to refer to technologies that were becoming increasingly important. The metaverse sits in this same category.

**Benefits from the metaverse:**

1. If you spend too long reading about big tech companies like Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft, you might end up feeling advances in technology (like the rise of the metaverse) are inevitable.
2. It’s hard not to then start thinking about how these **new technologies** will shape our society, **politics and culture**, and how we might fit into that future.
3. This idea is called “**technological determinism**”, the sense that advances in technology shape our social relations, power relations, and culture, with us as mere passengers.
4. It leaves out the fact that in a **democratic society** we have a say in how all of this plays out.
5. For Facebook and other large corporations, determined to **embrace the “next big thing”** before their competitors, the metaverse is exciting because it presents an opportunity for new markets, new kinds of social network, new consumer electronics and new patents.

Is technology the only challenge?

No. It is only a part of the issue. Like with any technological disruption that **impacts human lives and how they interact**, one cannot discount the impact metaverse will have on our lives.

Take for instance, the **evolution of social media** such as Facebook. Far from connecting with friends, the company have come under scrutiny for hate speech and resulting violence, anti-trust lawsuits for abuse of dominance, and privacy and security breaches.

The metaverse, too, will have **similar issues related to data security**.

According to Ball, “The metaverse will need altogether new rules for censorship, control of communications, regulatory enforcement, tax reporting, the prevention of online radicalization,
and many more challenges that we’re still struggling with today.”

What are critics saying?
Privacy is an area of concern because in an immersive environment, such as metaverse, a lot more of one’s personality and information will be revealed. Social media platforms, like Facebook, essentially make their money through targeted advertisements. It has to be recorded, however, that Mr. Zuckerberg has in his note mentioned privacy and safety as things that “need to be built into the metaverse from day one”. The concept that he has a full plan to pivot his trillion-dollar social media firm into a metaverse company in the coming years.

Conclusion:
The Internet is a wide set of protocols, technology, tubes and languages, plus access devices and content and communication experiences atop them. Metaverse will be too. Zuckerberg not only has to develop the hardware, software and experience on its own, it also requires a lot of investment to create the core infrastructure and billions of dollars of investment to make the metaverse a reality. Going by Facebook’s track record with privacy and misinformation, consumers might not choose to live in a virtual reality ‘metaverse’.

5. What is the Global Methane Pledge, and why is methane significant for climate change?

Methane is a major contributor to global warming
Contribution to warming in degrees Celsius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carbon dioxide</th>
<th>Methane</th>
<th>Volatile organic compounds*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Halogenated gases</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Black carbon</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nitrous oxide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aviation contrails</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible range

-0.3C 0C 0.3C 0.6C 0.9C 1.2C

Figures are for contributions to 2010-2019 warming relative to 1850-1900
*Volatile organic compounds and carbon monoxide
Context:

The **Global Methane Pledge** was launched at the ongoing **UN COP26 climate conference** in Glasgow.

So far, over 90 countries have signed this pledge, which is an effort led jointly by the United States and the European Union.

**Methane is the second-most abundant greenhouse gas** in the atmosphere, after **carbon dioxide**, and, therefore, pledges related to cutting down its emissions are significant.

**What is the Global Methane Pledge?**

The pledge was first announced in September by the US and EU, and is essentially an agreement to **reduce global methane emissions**.

One of the central aims of this agreement is to **cut down methane emissions by up to 30 per cent from 2020 levels by the year 2030**.

According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, methane accounts for about half of the 1.0 degrees Celsius net rise in global average temperature since the pre-industrial era.

**Rapidly reducing methane emissions** is complementary to action on carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and is regarded as the **single most effective strategy to reduce global warming** in the near term and keep the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach.

**What is methane?**

1. Methane is the simplest hydrocarbon, consisting of one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms (CH4). It is **flammable, and is used as a fuel** worldwide.

2. According to the UN, **25 per cent of the warming that the world** is experiencing today is because of **methane, a greenhouse gas**, which is also a component of natural gas. Because it is a greenhouse gas, **its presence in the atmosphere increases Earth’s temperature**.

3. The **Global Methane Pledge** agreement between the US and the EU sets a goal of reducing worldwide methane emissions by **at least 30% by 2030, based on 2020 levels**.

4. If implemented globally, this would minimise global warming by 0.2 degrees Celsius by the 2040s, compared to projected temperature rises.
5. The planet is presently around 1.2 degrees Celsius hotter than it was before the Industrial Revolution.

Sources of Methane emissions:

1. Approximately 40% of methane emitted is from natural sources and about 60% comes from human-influenced sources, including livestock farming, rice agriculture, biomass burning and so forth.

2. There are various sources of methane including human and natural sources. Human sources of methane include landfills, oil and natural gas systems, agricultural activities, coal mining, wastewater treatment, and certain industrial processes.

3. The oil and gas sectors are among the largest contributors to human sources of methane.

4. NASA notes that human sources (also referred to as anthropogenic sources) of methane are responsible for 60 per cent of global methane emissions.

5. These emissions come primarily from the burning of fossil fuels, decomposition in landfills and the agriculture sector.

6. In India, for instance, in 2019, the Ministry of Coal asked state-run coal miner Coal India Limited (CIL) to produce 2 MMSCB (million metric standard cubic metres) per day of coalbed methane (CBM) gas in the next 2 to 3 years.

7. CBM, like shale gas, is extracted from what are known as unconventional gas reservoirs — where gas is extracted directly from the rock that is the source of the gas (shale in case of shale gas and coal in case of CBM).

8. The methane is held underground within the coal and is extracted by drilling into the coal seam and removing the groundwater.

9. The resulting drop in pressure causes the methane to be released from the coal.

Lack of money, technology needs to be addressed for climate change:

1. More than the lack of adequate action on emission reductions, the developed countries have been found wanting in their commitment to help and support developing countries, especially the least developed ones, in dealing with the impacts of climate change.

2. This included providing money and technology to facilitate adaptation to the changing environment, something that the developed countries are mandated to do, not just under the Kyoto Protocol but also in the successor Paris Agreement regime.
3. But hardly any meaningful amount of money, or transfer of technology, took place under the Kyoto Protocol.

4. In 2009, at the Copenhagen conference, the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the developed countries would ‘mobilise’ $100 billion in “new and additional” climate finance for developing countries every year from 2020. This promise got written in the Paris Agreement as well.

5. While the developed countries claim that this sum has already started flowing, developing countries say there is very little money on offer, and that a lot of what is being dressed as climate finance is actually pre-existing aid or money flowing for other purposes.

6. Besides, $100 billion now seems like a paltry amount when estimates suggest that trillions of dollars are required in climate finance every year.

**Why is dealing with methane important for climate change?**

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), while methane has a much shorter atmospheric lifetime (12 years as compared to centuries for CO2), it is a much more potent greenhouse gas simply because it absorbs more energy while it is in the atmosphere.

In its factsheet on methane, the UN notes that methane is a powerful pollutant and has a global warming potential that is 80 times greater than carbon dioxide, about 20 years after it has been released into the atmosphere.

Significantly, the average methane leak rate of 2.3 per cent “erodes much of the climate advantage gas has over coal”.

The IEA has also said that more than 75 per cent of methane emissions can be mitigated with the technology that exists today, and that up to 40 per cent of this can be done at no additional costs.

**Conclusion:**

Recently, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has developed an anti-methanogenic feed supplement ‘Harit Dhara’ (HD), which can cut down cattle methane emissions by 17-20% and can also result in higher milk production.

The India GHG Program led by WRI India (non-profit organization), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is an industry-led voluntary framework to measure and manage greenhouse gas emissions.
6. Batting for ‘One South Asia’ makes more sense

Context:
Over the course of four days, at the G20 in Rome and COP26 (the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference) in Glasgow, Scotland, Prime Minister Modi spoke at nearly a dozen events, expanding on India’s plans to counter climate change.

India’s record since the 2015 Paris Accord and initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), as a part of which Mr. Modi (along with other leaders) launched the ‘Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS)’ at the World Leaders Summit at COP26 were widely welcomed.

The announcement of India’s new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the “Panchamrit” or five goals for the future elicited applause from across the audience.

Missing however, was any reference to India’s own region, the subcontinent, South Asia, without which India’s multiple forays on fighting climate change could well prove fruitless.
South Asian region and Climate Change:

**South Asia** is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate shocks.

The region is living through a “new climate normal” in which intensifying heat waves, cyclones, droughts, and floods are testing the limits of government, businesses, and citizens to adapt.

More than half of all South Asians, or 750 million people in the 8 countries — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were affected by one or more climate-related disasters in the last two decades.

Accelerating climate adaptation is critical to building resilience to the rapidly warming climate in the region.

South Asia is pioneering many climate-smart solutions, including innovative community approaches to coastal resilience, scaling up renewable energy and regenerative forestry.

**South Asia’s feeble voice: South Asian initiative on climate change:**

1. The absence of a South Asian initiative on climate change led by India, accrues to a number of obvious reasons:

2. **India-Pakistan tensions** that have led to the degradation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process, especially since 2014, when the last SAARC summit was held;

3. **Events in Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover** which will bring it closer to its Central Asian rather than South Asian neighbours;

4. The **differences over pollution issues** within the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) grouping that has held up its initiatives like the common Motor Vehicle Agreement (due mainly to Bhutan’s opposition); and

5. Slow movement amongst the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (**BIMSTEC countries**) along the Bay of Bengal that have yet to bring about a common charter at the global level despite adding climate change as an area of cooperation a decade ago.

**Other drawbacks in South Asian region countries group:**

South Asia is slowly becoming the world’s biggest area of concern when it comes to climate change.

According to this year’s **Global Climate Risk Index**, India and Afghanistan are among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of vulnerability, but South Asia classifies for the overall lowest values.
By one estimate, **20 out of 23 major cyclone disasters in the world** in the past have occurred around the Bay of Bengal region, and global warming, coastal degradation and soil salinity as well as water scarcities cause the deaths of thousands in South Asia each year.

The **Asian Development Bank** now predicts a decrease of 11% in South Asian GDPs by 2100 if “Business-As-Usual (BAU) Emissions” are maintained.

With global warming and sea levels rising, other estimates predict there will be nearly 63 million climate migrants in South Asia by 2050.

1. While India and other countries in the region access global banks, including the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB), the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Asian Development Bank for projects individually, there is **no single South Asian entity the banks** could work with for a **more targeted focus and more concessional financing** for the problem that faces the region.

2. **Growing carbon footprints** as well as **post-COVID-19 economic compulsions** are driving countries into closer regional coalitions, looking for solutions closer home, than those provided by globalisation and long-distance supply chains.

3. South Asia has remained an exception, persistently showing **lower inter-regional trade and connectivity**, and **lower levels of cooperation on migrant labour issues, inter-state tourism and cross-border employment than other regions**.

4. Finally, New Delhi has often warned of the pernicious influence of ‘Chinese solutions’ to problems in the subcontinent, ranging from unsustainable infrastructure financing to environmentally harmful projects as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but it has been unable to proffer a viable alternative, with or without its Quad partners.

5. When New Delhi failed to respond to Sri Lanka’s request for assistance with its currency and debt crisis last year, the Rajapaksa government turned to Bangladesh for a **currency swap arrangement**.

6. The problems between India and Pakistan that have **multiplied manifold** in the past few years are no doubt a major obstacle, but not one that cannot be surmounted in the face of a common challenge, as the special SAARC conference on COVID-19 in March 2020 showed.

**Green potential:**

When India speaks of the need for climate justice, global funding and climate adaptation technology transfer, India’s voice would only be strengthened multiple times if it speaks for South Asia as a whole.
According to the World Bank’s newly launched South Asia road map, climate-smart investment opportunities in South Asia total a whopping $3.4 trillion, with “energy-efficient green buildings” alone representing an investment potential of more than $1.5 trillion. Green transport connectivity and infrastructure, electric vehicles could represent another $950 billion in investment opportunities by 2030.

This does not include the vast sums of funding available for cross-regional solar grids, windfarms and run-of-river energy projects.

Need to work and implement South Asia Climate Roadmap:

1. The (WBG) World Bank Group’s South Asia Climate Roadmap will help the region ramp up its climate action in key transitions:
   a. The Agriculture, Food, Water, and Land Systems Transition
   b. The Energy and Transport Transition
   c. The Urban Transition

2. The WBG will also work to achieve systemic resilience across sectors and mobilize financing and investment.

3. Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic offers South Asian countries a unique opportunity to adapt to and mitigate climate change by massively investing in resilient infrastructure, reskilling their populations for high-productivity jobs, and rebuilding their economies around cleaner energy.

4. The World Bank Group is committed to this agenda and helping the countries of South Asia tackle the impacts of climate change.

5. The South Asia Climate Roadmap builds on the World Bank Group’s Climate Change Action Plan and commitment to boosting climate action at the country level by directing 35 percent of its lending portfolio in South Asia to climate-related actions, on average, over the next five years.

6. The South Asia Climate Roadmap will also support the development of key cutting-edge analytical tools to inform country climate planning and development strategies in South Asia.

Conclusion:

When it comes to climate change, there is a chance to turn this trend, and for India, the largest country in the region sharing the most boundaries with other South Asian neighbours, to lead the
way to find holistic solutions: accessing funding, tapping the latest climate adaptation technology, and finding cross-border markets for renewable energy networks.

Mr. Modi’s “One Sun One World One Grid” and ‘Panchamrit plans’ would clearly pack more punch if they contain a clear road map for the region, and strive for a common South Asian taskforce to tackle the enormous challenge that lies ahead for India and its neighbourhood this century.

7. Reforming the fertilizer sector

- FM announced the extra allocation of Rs.65,000 crore for fertilizer subsidy in FY2020-21
- This is over and above the budgeted Rs.71,309 crore for 2020-21
- This additional allocation, if released, will wipe off the entire pending dues and subsidy requirement for 2020-21 estimated to be around Rs.128,000-133,000 crore
- Of the Rs. 71,309 crore allocated for fertilizer subsidy in Fy 2020-21, till September around Rs. 55,390 crore (around 78%) has been released

Introduction:

Since 1991, when economic reforms began in India, several attempts have been made to reform the fertilizer sector to keep a check on the rising fertilizer subsidy bill, promote the efficient use of fertilizers, achieve balanced use of N, P and K (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium), and reduce water and air pollution caused by fertilizers like urea.

Importance of the fertilizer sector:

The importance of the fertilizer sector in India need hardly be emphasized as it provides a very vital input for the growth of Indian agriculture and is an inevitable factor that has to be reckoned with in the attainment of the goal of self-sufficiency in food grains.
The fertilizer sector would cover not merely the fertilizer industry but also certain activities in the agricultural sector, which are very intimately linked with the production and distribution of fertilizers.

The fertilizer industry has to cater to the needs of the farmers who are the most important consumers of the fertilizer industry.

With falling farm yields, exacerbated by climate effects, doubling farmers’ real income by FY23 will be difficult, which means continuing to subsidize fertilizer will work against the government’s stated goals for the agriculture sector. In this context, the fertilizer policy needs to be revisited.

**Issues: Increase in subsidy has been continued since post-Liberalization:**


2. The Union Budget of July 1991 raised the issue prices of fertilizers by 40% on average. But from August that year, this was reduced to 30%, and small and marginal farmers were exempted from the price increase.

3. The Economic Survey further noted that even with this 30% increase, fertilizer subsidy remained substantial and needed to be reduced further.

4. Thus, little success has been achieved on any of the three fronts. Rather, there has been an uncontrolled increase in subsidies on urea, due both to almost freezing the MRP of urea in different time periods and its rising sale leading to an increase in indiscriminate and imbalanced use of fertilizers.

5. Concerned with the adverse environmental impact of certain chemical fertilizers, some sections of society suggest the use of organic fertilizers and biofertilizers instead.

6. There is a growing demand to provide subsidies and other incentives for organic fertilizers and biofertilizers to match those provided for chemical fertilizers.

7. Fertilizer subsidy has doubled in a short period of three years. For 2021-22, the Union Budget has estimated fertilizer subsidy at ₹79,530 crore (from ₹66,468 crore in 2017-18) but it is likely to reach a much higher level due to the recent upsurge in the prices of energy, the international prices of urea and other fertilizers, and India’s dependence on imports.

8. In 2019-20, fertilizer use per hectare of cultivated area varied from 70 kg of NPK in Rajasthan to 250 kg in Telangana. This gap was much wider at the district level.

9. Further, composition of total plant nutrients in terms of the N,P,K ratio deviated considerably from the recommended or optimal NPK mix. It was 33.7:8.0:1 in Punjab and 1.3:0.7:1 in Kerala.
10. **Inter-State disparities in fertilizer subsidy**: This also has implications for *inter-State disparities in fertilizer subsidy* due to high variations in subsidy content, which is highly biased towards urea and thus nitrogen.

11. As a result, the **magnitude of fertilizer subsidy** among the major States ranges in the ratio of 8:1.

12. The government introduced the **Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS)** in 2010 to address the **growing imbalance in fertilizer use** in many States, which is skewed towards urea (N). However, only non-nitrogenous fertilizers (P and K) moved to NBS; urea was left out.

**The way forward:**

In order to address the **multiple goals of fertilizer policy**, we need to simultaneously work on four key policy areas.

1. One, we **need to be self-reliant** and not depend on import of fertilizers. In this way, we can escape the vagaries of high volatility in international prices.
   
   a. In this direction, **five urea plants** at Gorakhpur, Sindri, Barauni, Talcher and Ramagundam are being **revived in the public sector**.

2. Two, we **need to extend the NBS model to urea** and allow for **price rationalisation of urea** compared to non-nitrogenous fertilizers and prices of crops.
   
   a. The present system of keeping the price of urea fixed and absorbing all the price increases in subsidy needs to be replaced by distribution of price change over **both price as well as subsidy** based on some rational formula.

3. Three, we need to **develop alternative sources of nutrition for plants**.
   
   a. Discussions with farmers and consumers reveal a strong desire to shift towards the use of non-chemical fertilizers as well as a demand for **bringing parity in prices and subsidy given to chemical fertilizers with organic and biofertilizers**.
   
   b. This also provides the **scope to use a large biomass of crop** that goes waste and enhance the **value of livestock byproducts**.
   
   c. We **need to scale up and improve innovations** to develop **alternative fertilizers**. Though compost contains low amounts of nitrogen, technologies are now available to enrich this.

**Need to shift our focus to Bio-fertilizers:**
1. Bio-fertilizers are **cheap, renewable and eco-friendly**, with great potential to supplement plant nutrients if applied properly.

2. However, they are **not a substitute to chemical fertilizers**. They **improve health of the soil**. Since it provides nutrients to soil in a small and steady manner, its immediate effects are not very visible.

3. Sales of bio fertilizers in the country has not picked up because of lack of knowledge and its slow impact on the productivity of the soil.

4. Use of bio fertilizers is necessary to **maintain the soil health** as more and more use of chemical fertilizers kills all the microorganisms available in the soil, which are so essential for maintain the soil health.

5. Supplementary use of bio fertilizers with chemical fertilizers can **help maintain the soil fertility over a long period**.

6. The overall strategy for increasing crop yields and sustaining them at a high level must include an integrated approach to the management of soil nutrients, along with other complementary measures.

7. An **integrated approach** recognizes that soils are the storehouse of most of the plant nutrients **essential for plant growth** and that the way in which nutrients are managed will have a **major impact on plant growth, soil fertility, and agricultural sustainability**.

8. Farmers, researchers, institutions, and Government all have an important role to play in **sustaining agricultural productivity**.

**Conclusion:**

India should pay attention to **improving fertilizer efficiency** through **need-based use** rather than broadcasting fertilizer in the field.

The recently developed **Nano urea by IFFCO** shows promising results in reducing the usage of urea. Such products need to be promoted expeditiously after testing.

These changes will go a long way in enhancing the **productivity of agriculture, mitigating climate change**, providing an alternative to chemical fertilizers and balancing the fiscal impact of fertilizer subsidy on the Union Budgets in the years to come.
8. Wide fault lines within the Global Climate Risk Index

Context:
The address by Barbados Prime Minister at the 26th United Nations Conference of Parties, or COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland, attracted global attention with her remark that failure to provide critical adaptation finance as well as measuring the extent of loss caused by climate change with respect to “lives and livelihoods” was immoral.

This has again brought the complexity in measuring climate risk to the forefront.

Definition of Climate Risk and vulnerability:
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), under the aegis of the United Nations, defines climate risk as the likelihood of unfavourable impacts occurring as a result of severe climate events interacting with vulnerable environmental, social, economic, political or cultural conditions.

Quantitatively, it is the product of the probability of a climate event occurring and its adverse consequences.
About Global Climate Risk Index:

1. The international environmental think tank ‘Germanwatch’ released the Global Climate Risk Index 2021. It is published annually.

2. Germanwatch, based in Bonn and Berlin (Germany), is an independent development and environmental organisation which works for sustainable global development.

3. The Global Climate Risk Index analyses quantified impacts of extreme weather events, in terms of fatalities and impact of extreme weather events.

4. The index is based on the data from the Munich Re NatCatSERVICE, which is considered worldwide as one of the most reliable and complete databases on this matter.

5. The Index aims at contextualising ongoing climate policy debates, especially the International climate negotiations – looking at the near world impacts in 2019 and the past two decades.

Methodology and Interpretation by GCRI:

1. Recent discussions around climate risk assessment and management have been based on the “Global Climate Risk Index” (GCRI), published annually by GermanWatch, a non-profit organisation.


3. According to the publishing agency, the rankings are meant to forewarn countries about the possibility of more frequent and/or severe climate-related events in the future.

4. This index uses historical data to provide insights on exposure to extreme events. It cannot be used for linear forecasts about future climate impact.

5. There are deep fault lines in the methodology and interpretation of the country rankings. Recommendations based on this index should be generated with caution.

Fault lines on which GCRI ranks the countries:

1. First, the GCRI ranks countries based on four key indicators:
   a. Number of deaths; number of deaths per 1,00,000 inhabitants; sum of losses in Purchasing Power Parity (in U.S. dollars); and losses per unit of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
b. Of these indicators, two are absolute while the other two are relative. However, the GCRI report does not provide a rationale for the selection of these macro indicators.

2. Second, the index suffers from exclusion errors and selection bias.
   a. Composite indicators are better constructed using micro indicators instead of macro indicators, which measure loss because isolating the effect of the loss of elements on GDP is fraught with errors.
   b. Instead, a number of key micro indicators such as the total number of people injured, loss of livestock, loss of public and private infrastructure, crop loss and others are better candidates for assessing the composite loss resulting from climate change events.

3. Third, the index accounts for information on weather-related events like storms, floods, temperature extremes and mass movements.
   a. However, it omits geological incidents like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or tsunamis, which may be potentially triggered by climate change and can have economic and humanitarian impact.

4. Fourth, the ranking under the GCRI is done based on data collected by Munich Re’s NatCatService, which is not validated at the ground-level.
   a. The data gaps particularly with regard to economic losses are based on experience, the prevailing intellectual property of MunichRe and the market value of elements at risk that are at best approximate values of economic losses.

Delays in action and response:

1. Any discussion on measurement and management of climate risk is incomplete without accounting for issues of uncertainty, scale and delays between action and response to climate change.

2. Therefore, climate change can at best be managed within a comprehensive risk assessment framework, which uses climate information to better cope with the impact of climate change.

3. In this context, India’s latest module on the National Disaster Management Information System (NDMIS) captures damages and losses caused by disasters and monitors the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

4. The NDMIS captures details on parameters like death, injury, affected population by categories as well as economic losses in social and infrastructure sectors due to weather and
geological events on a daily basis. The data captured by the NDMIS includes all major climatic events.

The burden of development:

1. Eight of the 10 countries most affected between 2000 and 2019 were developing countries with low or lower middle income per capita.

2. Vulnerable people in developing countries suffered most from extreme weather events like storms, floods and heatwaves, whereas the impact of climate change was visible around the globe.

3. Poorer countries are hit hardest because they are more vulnerable to the damaging effects of a hazard and have the lower coping capacity.

India’s Action plan irrespective of Index rankings:

1. [India's first climate change assessment report](https://www.insightsonindia.com), published in 2020, projected that temperatures would rise 4.4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century in a "business as usual" scenario.

2. The frequency of heatwaves will be up to four times higher, cyclone intensity will increase and sea level will rise by 30 cm (12 inches) if action is not taken, the report said.

3. Many leave home when there is little work in farming or fishing to find jobs on construction sites or in cotton fields in Maharashtra, Gujarat and New Delhi.

4. More than 70% of households in the study said droughts were happening significantly more often in the last 5 to 10 years, leading to an increase in so-called distress migration when people feel they have no other option to survive.

5. We need to plan for the hundreds of millions of people who it is predicted will have to migrate in the coming decades due to climate change.

6. [India's social protection programmes](https://www.insightsonindia.com) do not consider extreme weather and were not designed to build climate resilience.

7. The national rural employment guarantee scheme — which promises 100 days of work per year to every household — does not act as "a viable safety net" due to delays in wage payments and a lack of transparency, the report said.

8. Besides revamping existing mechanisms, there was a need for pre-emptive action before a disaster strikes.
9. Making migration safe for people forced to move by climate pressures should involve "anticipatory wage employment" and portability of social protection entitlements.

Conclusion:

**Deploying effective approaches and principles** to foster collaboration among climate risk information users and providers, along with enabling the implementation of **effective management actions**, will allow India to leapfrog on the targets **envisaged in the Sendai Framework**.

**Proactive and timely need-based adaptation** is important. Without it, there will be a huge fiscal burden in the future.

A **more collaborative approach** towards climate change adaptation is crucial.

Next-generation reforms will promote new business and climate service opportunities across several sectors and thus **create a sustainable economy**.

**9. Does India have a right to burn fossil fuels?**

Context:
There has been quite a lot of debate on India’s dependence on coal against the backdrop of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) meeting.

Despite the environment minister adopting a similar position on the eve of the COP26, the Government of India has, for the first time, made a commitment to achieve the net zero target by 2070.

The crux of the theoretical argument is that India needs to develop, and development requires energy.

Is India emitting higher carbon emissions?

1. Since India has neither historically emitted nor currently emits carbon anywhere close to what the global North has, or does, in per capita terms, it has no reason to commit to declining dependence on coal, at least in the near future.

2. If anything, the argument goes, it should ask for a higher and fairer share in the global carbon budget.

3. There is no doubt that this carbon budget framework is an excellent tool to understand global injustice but to move from there to our ‘right to burn’ is a big leap.

4. It is like arguing that since India was colonised, it has a right to do the same and stopping the country from doing that is injustice.

5. For development, do the countries in the global South necessarily need to increase their share in the global carbon budget?

6. Thankfully the answer is ‘no’ and it does not come at the cost of development, even in the limited sense as development is defined generally.

Types of injustice:

1. Developed countries have usurped more than their fair share of the global carbon budget.

2. Reaching net zero alone is not enough, as it is the cumulative emissions up to net zero that determine the temperatures that is reached.

3. India’s cumulative and per capita current emissions are significantly low and far less than its fair share of global carbon budget.

4. The framework of addressing global injustice in terms of a carbon budget is quite limiting in its scope in more ways than one.
5. Such an injustice is not at the level of the nation-states alone; there is such injustice between the rich and the poor within nations and between humans and non-human species.

6. A progressive position on justice would take these injustices into account instead of narrowly focusing on the framework of nation-states.

7. Not only is it not primarily responsible, but the global South, especially its poor, will unduly bear the effect of climate change because of its tropical climate and high population density along the coastal lines.

8. So, arguing for more coal is like shooting oneself in the foot. It is true that mitigation from the South alone will not make the difference required to stop this catastrophe but burning more coal will not necessarily solve the problem either.

The question of development:

1. Infrastructure, or construction, essential for urbanisation and quality of living is responsible for two-fifths of global carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion and 25% of emissions overall.

2. These emissions arise from energy intensive cement production and half of the steel produced which is used in construction, both having no substitutes.

3. India’s emissions story cannot be bracketed with the top three. India is responsible for no more than 4.37% cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide since the pre-industrial era.

4. Even though it is home to more than a sixth of humanity. India’s per capita emissions are less than half the world average, less than one-eighth of the U.S.’s, and have shown no dramatic increase like China’s post 2000.

5. However, by 2030 India will ensure 50% of its energy will be sourced from renewable energy sources.

6. India will reduce its carbon emissions until 2030 by a billion tonnes. India will also reduce its emissions intensity per unit of GDP by less than 45%.

7. India would also install 500 Gigawatt of renewable energy by 2030, a 50 GW increase from its existing targets.

8. With the announcement of a net zero emissions target for 2070 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow, India has joined a high-profile group of countries.
9. Others with net zero goals include major emitters such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union with a 2050 target, and China aiming for 2060. A dozen countries besides the EU have a legal enactment towards the goal.

**Way Forward:**

Chalking out an **independent, greener path to development** may create conditions for such negotiations and give the South the **moral high ground** to force the North to come to the table, like South Africa did at Glasgow.

One of the ways in which this can be done is by making the **global North pay for the energy transition in the South**.

Net zero should be a pathway to real and transformative climate action and not greenwash.

**Conclusion:**

The need of the hour is a **global progressive agenda** that does not pit the working class of the North against the South but the working people of the world as a whole resisting the global ruling elite in its aggressive and dangerous model of competitive emissions.

Carbon emissions need to be reduced now, and land-based climate solutions must center ‘**food-first’ approaches** that help achieve both zero emissions and zero hunger.

The only way to sustain the reduced emissions for whole world is governments **taking conscious decisions** to change the sources of energy like moving towards renewable energy sources.

**10. Why North Chennai is the worst-hit in this year’s heavy rains**
The Madras High Court pulled up the Greater Chennai Corporation for flooding in the city due to heavy rain and said that it would start Suo motu proceedings if the situation did not improve soon.

Chennai and several other parts of Tamil Nadu have been receiving heavy rainfall since 3 days, leading to waterlogging and damage to homes.

At least five people have died because of the rain and over 1,400 have been moved to relief camps.

The Madras High Court brought up the flooding in Chennai while hearing a public interest litigation on removing encroachments to ensure that roads in the city are wide enough.

In 2015 and during many such extreme weather systems that Chennai has witnessed, it was mostly central and southern parts of the Tamil Nadu capital that bore the brunt.

However, in the rains that have lashed Chennai in the past five days, North Chennai, the city’s congested neighbourhood with a largely working class population and several industries, is worst-affected.

**Why is North Chennai more impacted due to heavy rains than other areas?**

That is largely thanks to its low-lying topography. While the entire Chennai city is vulnerable to waterlogging for many reasons, including a much lower elevation above the sea level, which is often about six metres, what has made things worse for North Chennai is the absence of storm water drain networks and poor desilting of canals.

Multiple officials of Chennai Corporation, who had been managing waterlogging in North Chennai said the debris from construction and other commercial activities was another key factor that has led to flooding in North Chennai.

“Storm water drains here are inadequate in number and those existing networks and canals too were blocked.”

**Polluting and destroying natural urban water bodies:**

1. As the incidence of climate variability and extreme weather events increases, urban flooding becomes more and more common.

2. While the untimely heavy rains can be attributed to climate variability, the urban flooding is largely due to an unplanned urbanisation.

3. A major issue in India cities. Lakes can store the excess water and regulate the flow of water.
4. Indian cities are becoming increasingly impervious to water, not just because of increasing built up but also because of the nature of materials used (hard, non-porous construction material that makes the soil impervious).

5. However, pollution of natural urban water bodies and converting them for development purposes has increased risk of floods.

6. Reduced infiltration due paving of surfaces which decreases ground absorption and increases the speed and amount of surface flow.

7. Old and ill maintained drainage system is another factor making cities in India vulnerable to flooding.

8. Lack of attention to natural hydrological system and lack of flood control measures.

**Unplanned urbanisation of Anthropogenic activity:**

1. India has a long coastline of 7,500 km and an estimated 14% of India's total population lives alongside it that traverses nine states, 77 towns and cities including some of the fastest-growing such as Mumbai, Chennai, and Kochi making them more prone to flood due to adjacent sea and erratic monsoonal behaviour.

2. Aside from the present danger posed by extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and cyclonic storms, more slow-onset impacts brought about by climate change also threaten the coastline.

3. A 2016 UN report estimated that 40 million people in India will be at risk from sea-level rise by 2050.

4. Urban flooding is significantly different from rural flooding as urbanization leads to developed catchments which increases the flood peaks from 1.8 to 8 times and flood volumes by up to 6 times.

**Way Ahead steps:**

1. The management of urban flooding has to be treated holistically in a multi-disciplinary manner.

2. Science and technology can play a significant role in improved monitoring, modelling/forecasting, and decision-support systems.

3. One method for improving the preparedness for urban flooding is by setting up a vulnerability-based geospatial framework to generate and analyze different scenarios.
4. It helps in **identifying and planning** for the most effective/appropriate actions in a **dynamic way** to incorporate day-to-day changes that take place in urban areas, having the potential to alter the prevailing vulnerability profile.

**Solutions:**

1. **Innovative approaches** like Sponge Cities- wetland restoration, flushing systems using collected rooftop water, bioswales, and public spaces as flexible water retention facilities can be applied to Indian urban areas.

2. Other such methods include permeable material for roads and pavement, green roofs and harvesting systems in buildings.

3. **Urban Flood management** will not just help control recurring floods but also respond to other fault lines, provide for water security, more green spaces, and will make the city resilient and sustainable.

4. Watershed management and **emergency drainage plan** should be clearly enunciated in policy and law.

5. **Proper management of the drainage system** is necessary to ensure that the water does not get stored in one place.

6. **Solid waste** increases hydraulic roughness, causes blockage and generally reduces flow capacity.

7. These drains need to be cleaned on a regular basis to permit the free flow of water.

8. **Vulnerability analyses and risk assessments** should form part and parcel of city master plans

**Conclusion:**

In most of the streets and neighbourhoods that were flooded this time, it took longer than usual for the water to recede.

That happened not only due to lack of drains but also because of faulty road planning wherein re-laid roads and several concrete road stretches have been higher than houses and building complexes either side.

As the world continues to urbanize, **sustainable development** depends increasingly on the successful management of urban growth, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the pace of urbanization is projected to be the fastest.
Integrated policies to improve the lives of both urban and rural dwellers are needed, while strengthening the linkages between urban and rural areas, building on their existing economic, social and environmental ties.
ESSAYS

Write an essay on the following topic in not more than 1000-1200 words:

- November 28, 2021: The whole is more than a sum of its parts

- November 21, 2021: Scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity

- November 14, 2021: The price of our vitality is the sum of all our fears

- November 7, 2021: Lawlessness is the result of failure to cultivate a sense of self-evaluation