



CENTRE FOR AMBITION
(An Institute for Civil Services)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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AADHAR ISSUE

In 2009, the government of India launched a new identification program that has gone on to become the largest biometric database in the world. The program, known as Aadhaar, has collected the names, addresses, phone numbers—and perhaps more significantly, fingerprints, photographs, and iris scans—of more than 1 billion people.

Benefits of Aadhar

- **JAM trinity** – *JanDhanYojana, Aadhaar and Mobile numbers* – This will make the government support to poor more targeted and less distortive.
- **Identification of the beneficiaries of government's welfare schemes** – Aadhar will help to remove fake and duplicates identities. It can be used to filter the list of beneficiaries and stop the leakage of public money.
- **To tackle the black money issue** – Use of Aadhar in financial transactions can reduce the menace of black money in the country.
- **In Income tax return** – Use of Aadhar in income tax filing will reduce the number of documents needed. It can make the process more efficient and cost-effective way.
- **In Opening a bank account** – There is no need to collect multiple identity proofs or run around for documentation. Your humble Aadhaar Card is ample proof of your identity and address.
- **In getting subsidies directly to the bank account** – By linking Aadhar with bank accounts, subsidies like LPG will get credited to bank account directly.
- **To get pension money on time** – By just registering with the Aadhaar number, pension-related documentation process will be eased and a timely payout of pension money can be ensured.
- **The issue of digital Life certificate** – Aadhar number can be used to get a digital life certificate. It will help pensioners without the hassle of physically going to the bank and submitting the life certificate.
- **Easy Provident Fund disbursement** – The Aadhaar will ensure that the Provident Fund money is not diverted and is disbursed directly to the pensioner's account.
- Accepted as a **proof of address by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** for investing in stock market.
- **Mapping development parameters** – In critical sectors of the country like healthcare and education, Aadhar can be used to map the development process.

- It can help **to map skilled manpower**, based on the vocational training acquired by the individual, to suitable job vacancies/ skill requirements of the State.

Main security concerns

- Aadhaar is **mass surveillance technology**. Unlike, targeted surveillance which is a good thing, and essential for national security and public order — **mass surveillance undermines security**.
- Also, experts argue that **biometric information is necessary for targeted surveillance, but not suitable for everyday transactions between the state and law abiding citizens**. It can easily be misused.
- Even though the UIDAI claims that this is a **zero knowledge database** promising high level of security, there is a chance for misuse using the unique identifiers for the registered devices and time stamps that are used for authentication.

OTHER ISSUES

- ❖ **Questionable Legal Backing:** The current legal backing of Aadhaar is via a money bill.
- ❖ **Issues with sharing information collected under Aadhaar** – The provisions in the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, benefits and services) Act, 2016 Act with regard to the protection of identity information and authentication records may be affected by recent verdict by Supreme Court that Right to Privacy is a Fundamental Right.
- ❖ **Violation of rights** – It was argued that the UIDAI might share the biometric information of people with other government agencies and thus would violate people's right to privacy.
- ❖ **Has potential to profile individuals** – The Act does not specifically prohibit law enforcement and intelligence agencies from using the Aadhaar number as a link (key) across various datasets (such as telephone records, air travel records, etc.) in order to recognise patterns of behaviour. Techniques such as various computer programmes across data sets for pattern recognition can be used for detecting potential illegal activities. However, there may be chances that innocent individuals can be identified incorrectly.

Role of UID Authority

- ❖ specifying demographic and biometric information to be collected during enrolment,
- ❖ assigning Aadhaar numbers to individuals,
- ❖ authenticating Aadhaar numbers, and
- ❖ Specifying the usage of Aadhaar numbers for delivery of subsidies and services.

The UID authority will authenticate the Aadhaar number of an individual, if an entity makes such a request. A requesting entity (an agency or person that wants to authenticate information of a person) has to obtain the consent of an individual before collecting his information. The agency can use the disclosed information only for purposes for which the individual has given consent.

- ❖ Government should assure the citizens that it has the technology and systems to protect the data collected.
- ❖ It should assure the citizens of India that it will do everything possible to prevent unauthorised disclosure of or access to such data.
- ❖ It should recognise all dimensions of the right to privacy and address concerns about data safety, protection from unauthorised interception, surveillance, use of personal identifiers and bodily privacy.
- ❖ The data controller should be made accountable for the collection, processing and use to which data are put.

After a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court on the **right to privacy**, Minister of Electronic and Information Technology, has indicated that the [data protection law](#) would be in place by December. The union minister said that the new bill would be drafted keeping the recent right to privacy judgment in mind.

SUB CATEGORISATION OBC

The Union Cabinet has approved a proposal to set up a panel to examine sub-categorisation of the Socially and Educationally Other Backward Castes (OBCs). Chief justice of Delhi high court, justice G Rohini has been assigned to head the commission set up to examine the sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The commission has been tasked with examining the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities with reference to the central OBC list and also work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorization.

Mandal Commission and aftermath

The Mandal Commission was established in India in 1979 by the (Janata Party) government with a mandate to “identify the socially or educationally backward.” It was headed by Indian parliamentarian B.P. Mandal to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination, and used eleven social, economic, and educational indicators to determine backwardness. In 1980, the commission’s report affirmed the affirmative action practice under Indian law whereby members of Other Backward Classes (OBC), were given exclusive access to a certain portion of government Jobs and slots in public universities. 27% seats in central government jobs and educational institutions are reserved for the backward classes after Mandal Commission recommendations were implemented by the government in 1990, resulting in a paradigm shift in the national polity. The decision was later upheld by the Supreme Court in the IndraSawhney Case. Earlier this year, the government gave constitutional status to the National Backward Classes Commission through a Constitution amendment Bill.

Need of subcategorization

There are inequalities within unequal entities. That reservation in jobs and education did address socio-economic disparities in India to some degree is true. But, equally, the benefits of reservation have not been distributed equitably, and large segments of the weaker sections and backward classes continue to have no access to quality education or meaningful employment. The relatively rich and dominant sections among the backward castes have tended to take up a disproportionately larger share of the reservation pie.

Sub categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.

Major Challenges

There are two major challenges that the Commission may face - one, to develop a methodology for sub-categorisation of OBCs; two, availability of information regarding the social and educational backwardness of various castes and the state-wise variations of a particular caste. Vote-bank politics has a lot to do with the prioritising of caste-based categorisation over income-based differentiation to identify reservation beneficiaries.

If implemented properly, the government's efforts for equal distribution of OBC reservations will create a positive impact on the backward among the backward classes. It will be an ardent task for the Justice Rohini Commission to sub-categorise OBCs, at the same time the commission also has the responsibility to work out a formula that is acceptable to the communities within OBCs.

DOUBLING THE FARMERS INCOME

The past two years, the Centre launched a number of schemes for revival of agricultural growth and farmers' welfare. These include

- ❖ PradhanMantriFasalBimaYojana to reduce risk in crop production,
- ❖ E-national market for enabling farmers to access agricultural market and better price realisation for their produce.
- ❖ The PradhanMantriKrishiSinchayeeYojana (PMKSY), to focus on irrigation.
- ❖ The PradhanMantri Gram SadakYojana (PMGSY), has enabled farmers to carry their produce to the market, and also facilitated collection of milk from producers.
- ❖ Other path-breaking initiatives include the soil health card, neem coated urea, and the promotion of traditional farming practices through the ParamparagatKrishiVikasYojana (PKVY). Neem coated urea introduced by the government has led to better productivity, reduced both the use and price of urea, and eliminated the urea black market.

The **latest report by the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income** (DFI), which is headed by Ashok Dalwai, secretary for Government of India and former Additional Secretary, Union Agriculture Ministry, has recommended a transition from a price-based support policy to an income support policy to “accord importance to value realisation from post-production activities”. According to the DFI Committee, only increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) may not always have a positive outcome from the macroeconomic point of view. A potentially more beneficial means of raising farm incomes is by reforming the marketing system of agricultural produce and “developing new institutions and reviving existing ones to facilitate linking of the farmer to the markets”.

The quantitative framework by the committee for doubling farmers' income has identified seven sources of growth. These are:

- ❖ Increase in productivity of crops
- ❖ Increase in production of livestock
- ❖ Improvement in efficiency of input use (cost saving)

- ❖ Increase in crop intensity
- ❖ Diversification towards high value crops
- ❖ Improved price realization by farmers
- ❖ Shift of cultivators to non-farm jobs

Doubling farmers income by 2022 is quite challenging but it is needed and is attainable. Three pronged strategy focused on (i) development initiatives, (ii) technology and (iii) policy reforms in agriculture is needed to double farmers income.

- The rates of increase in sources underlying growth in output need to be accelerated by 33 per cent to meet the goal.
- The country need to increase use of quality seed, fertiliser and power supply to agriculture by 12.8, 4.4 and 7.6 per cent every year.
- Area under irrigation has to be expanded by 1.78 million hectare and area under double cropping should be increased by 1.85 million hectare every year.
- Besides, area under fruits and vegetables is required to increase by 5 per cent each year.
- In the case of livestock, improvement in herd quality, better feed, increase in artificial insemination, reduction in calving interval and lowering age at first calving are the potential sources of growth.

Most of the development initiatives and policies for agriculture are implemented by the States. States invest much more than the outlay by the Centre on many development activities, like irrigation. Progress of various reforms related to market and land lease are also State subjects. Therefore, it is essential to mobilise States and UTs to own and achieve the goal of doubling farmers' income. If concerted and well-coordinated efforts are made by the Centre and all the States and UTs, the Country can achieve the goal of doubling farmers' income by the year 2022.

INDIA JAPAN ANNUAL SUMMIT :

PM Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe held the 12th India-Japan annual summit in Gandhinagar in Gujarat and reviewed the progress in the cooperation between India and Japan. The summit took place amid rising tension in the region following the nuclear test by North Korea and growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Historical and Cultural ties : Buddhism was the first common link between both sides. Japanese links with Buddhism in India continue even today with a number of Japanese visitors travelling to cities like Bodh Gaya. The second vital connection between both sides was a result of the common feeling of Pan-Asianism.

Japan and India have strong cultural ties, based mainly on Japanese Buddhism, which remains widely practiced through Japan today .Cultural event like the annual **Namaste India Festival**, which started in Japan over twenty years ago and is now the largest festival of its kind in the world.

KEY AGREEMENTS

- An agreement was signed for open skies between India and Japan for unlimited number of flights to select cities.
- The India-Japan Investment Promotion Road map between DIPP and Ministry of External Trade & Industry (METI) to facilitate and accelerate Japanese investments in India.
- MoC between METI and the state of Gujarat on 'Japan-India special programme for Make In India' in MandalBechraj-Khoraj.

HIGHLIGHTS

Bullet train project : The massive high speed project at the cost of Rs 1.1 lakh crore that will reduce the travel time between Ahmedabad and Mumbai to three hours is significant on many counts. It is a giant leap in terms of technology for India which has Asia's largest rail network. The project has a deadline of 2022. It entails high technology transfer, creation of many jobs and is aligned with PM's flagship project 'Make in India'.

Indo-Pacific strategy : It encompasses connectivity projects, accessing markets, linking Asia to Africa, development of India's Northeast states and a renewed focus on resource-rich countries in the African region. There will be greater synergy between India's Act East Policy and Japan's Indo-Pacific plans besides two countries aligning their Africa strategic in a mutually beneficial manner.

AAGC – ASIA AFRICA GROWTH CORRIDOR: The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor or AAGC is an economic cooperation agreement between the governments of India and Japan. It aims for Indo-Japanese collaboration to develop quality infrastructure in Africa, complemented by digital connectivity, which would undertake the realization of the idea of creating free and open Indo-Pacific Region. The AAGC will give priority to development projects in health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and agro-processing, disaster management.

China Factor : With US keeping its Asia policy ambiguous and Beijing taking an even more aggressive stand on issues of sovereignty, India has to get closer to Japan. China is India's biggest neighbour and a partner on various forums such as BRICS and SCO which means India would have to strike a more fine balance in its ties with both China and Japan.

North Korea : Displaying strategic convergence, India and Japan asked North Korea to shut down its nuclear and missile programmes. The statement condemns North Korea, but for the first time, includes "the importance of holding accountable all parties" that helped that country develop its nuclear programme, which is not just an allusion to China, but also Pakistan.

TERRORISM : A joint statement issued after the summit sought the implementation of Resolution 1267 of the UN Security Council to counter cross-border terrorism. The clause calling for zero tolerance on terrorism referenced China's veto on the Jaish-e-Mohammad chief being put on the list of UN-designated terrorists.

TRADE : The **bilateral trade** between the two nations was **\$13.48 billion** and Japanese FDI in India was \$4.7 billion in **2016-17** and India remains an **attractive investment destination** for Japan. Economic relations between both have vast potential for growth, as **Japan finds market** for their sophisticated engineering & various kinds of infrastructure facilities in India, and it is expected to reach \$50 billion by 2019-20.

CONCLUSION : Improving relations with Japan provides a **natural counterbalance to China** and check its hegemony which was recently engaged over the **Doklam issue** with India. The trilateral naval exercise (**Malabar**) between **US, Japan and India** is important. USA has already its seventh fleet deployed in Yokosuka, Japan. Also, Shinzo Abe has talked about the Quadrilateral Dialogue, which runs in the background, and includes **Australia**.

Improving relations with **technologically advanced Japan** is also a good step and provides way forward for other **developmental projects in India**. Moreover, being a **counterbalance to China**, this relation can help India in improving its **Look East Policy** and open its gateways in **Indo-Pacific region**. Japan would also benefit and may like to improve its relations with **ASEAN members**, where India already has good relations with countries like Indonesia and Philippines.

BRICS SUMMIT 2017

BRICS is an annual summit of five nations viz. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The five members of BRICS represent 41% of world's population and 22% of global GDP.

The NDB is a multilateral development bank established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa with the objective of financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions toward global growth and development.

The 9th **BRICS Summit** was held in China's **Xiamen city** from 3rd-5th September ending with the adoption of Xiamen declaration. The **theme of this year's event was 'BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future'**. **Thailand, Tajikistan, Egypt, Guinea, and Mexico** were also invited to attend the summit.

Prime Minister Modi in his address spoke about development agenda 'Sabkasaath, sabkavikaas'. He followed up with "10 Noble Commitments" BRICS leaders can follow to achieve "global transformation".

PM Modi's 10 Noble Commitments

- Creating a safer world by organised and coordinated action on issues like counter-terrorism, cyber security and disaster management.
- Creating a greener world by countering climate change by taking initiatives such as the india-initiated international solar alliance.
- Creating an enabled work by sharing and deploying suitable technologies
- Creating an inclusive world "by economic mainstreaming of people including in the banking and financial system".
- Creating a digital world by bridging the digital divide.
- Creating a skilled world by offering future-ready skills to youth.

- Creating a healthier world by cooperating in research and enabling affordable health care for all.
- Creating an equitable world by providing equality of opportunity to all, particularly gender equality.
- Creating a connected world by enabling free flow of goods, persons and services.
- Creating a harmonious world by promoting ideologies that are focussed on peaceful coexistence and harmonious living with nature.

The **Xiamen Declaration** signed by the members during the summit emphasized that BRICS, as a forum, has “fostered the spirit of mutual respect and understanding, equality, solidarity, openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation,” among the members and reiterated the shared desire for “peace, security, development and cooperation.”

- ❖ For the first time the group’s declaration specifically named Pakistan-based terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and the Haqqani network. The Joint Declaration condemning terrorism stated “concern on the security situation in the region and violence caused by the Taliban, ISIL/DAISH, Al-Qaida and its affiliates including Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP and Hizbut-Tahrir.”
- ❖ For a long time trade and economics have been the key drivers of their bilateral relationship, while tricky geopolitical issues have continued to overshadow more productive aspects of their relationship at times.
- ❖ Coordination Center of BRICS Agriculture Research Platform will be established in India. It is a virtual network, which will address the issues of food security and nutrition, adaptation of agriculture to climate change, agricultural technology cooperation and innovation, agricultural trade and investment, and ICT application in agriculture to contribute to stable global agricultural growth and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.
- ❖ The BRICS nations are in mission-mode to eradicate poverty; to ensure health, sanitation, skills, food security, gender equality, energy, education.
- ❖ BRICS countries have resolved to promote the development of BRICS local currency bond markets and to jointly establish a BRICS local currency bond fund and also to facilitate financial market integration.
- ❖ The group agreed to enhance joint BRICS research, development and innovation in ICT including the Internet of Things, Cloud computing, Big Data, Data Analytics, Nanotechnology, Artificial Intelligence and 5G and their innovative applications to elevate the level of ICT infrastructure and connectivity in the BRICS countries.
- ❖ Good relationship between all the 5 BRICS nations and especially India and China is crucial in order to set precedent in this century which is being referred to as Asian Century.

INDIA MYANMAR AND ROHINGYA CRISIS

India and Myanmar have traditionally had much in common, with cultural, historical, ethnic and religious ties, in addition to sharing a long geographical land border and maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal.

MoUs signed between India and Myanmar.

- Maritime Security Cooperation
- Cultural Exchange Programme for year 2017-2020
- Cooperation in Medical Products Regulation
- Cooperation in the field of Health and medicine
- Technical Agreement for providing Coastal Surveillance System
- Establishment of MIIT
- Upgradation of Women's Police Training Centre at Yamethin, Myanmar
- Sharing White Shipping Information between Indian Navy and Myanmar Navy
- In the field of elections between Election Commission of India and Election Commission of Myanmar
- Cooperation between Press Council of India and Myanmar Press Council
- Establishment of India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of IT-Skill

INDIA MYANMAR AREA OF COOPERATION

Strengthening of the development cooperation framework between the countries is crucial. India has been actively involved in capacity building in Myanmar.

No other country has committed as much in grant-in-aid to Myanmar as India. India is developing four major connectivity projects in Myanmar namely o the Kaladan multi-modal corridor o repair of 69 bridges on the Tamu-Kalewa road To the construction of the 120-km Kalewa-Yargyi corridor (both of which are part of the IndiaMyanmar-Thailand trilateral highway), and o the Rhi-Tiddim road in the Chin state bordering Mizoram. } The Archeological Survey of India has recently done a splendid job of restoring the Ananda temple, a jewel among all Bagan pagodas.

Greater cooperation between Northeast India and Myanmar

Four states in the Northeast share common borders with Myanmar's Sagaing and Chin provinces. The Kaladan corridor also passes through the Rakhine state till it arrives at the Sittwe port developed by India.

ROHINGYA CRISIS

The Rohingya people are a Muslim minority group residing in the Rakhinestate and are considered to be a variation of the Sunni religion. The Rohingya people are considered "*stateless entities*", as the Myanmar government has been refusing to recognise them as one of the ethnic groups of the country. For this reason, the Rohingya people lack legal protection from the Government of Myanmar, are regarded as mere refugees from Bangladesh, and face strong hostility in the country. *They often described by Amnesty International as one of the most persecuted people on earth.* To escape the dire situation in Myanmar, the Rohingya try to illegally enter Southeast Asian states like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, begging for humanitarian support from potential host countries.

INDIA'S ISSUE

Minister of State for Home Affairs has stated it categorically that the government is looking for ways to deport over 40,000 Rohingyas living in the country illegally. The government is worried about the suspected infiltration of terror outfits among the displaced people living in various camps.

The UNHCR and the Amnesty International, however, asked India to reconsider its decision saying that the Rohingyas are the most persecuted ethnic group in the world. India should adopt humanitarian approach in dealing with Rohingya problem, they said.

Refusing to bow under international pressure over Rohingya crisis, India made it clear that it would not compromise with the security concerns of the country. However, the government decided to extend help to Bangladesh in providing all amenities to the fleeing Rohingyas, who are being relocated in camps there. India also asked Myanmar to end persecution of Rohingyas.

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that many Rohingyas have acquired documents meant for Indian citizens only like Aadhaar, PAN and Voter-ID. This raises the concern of naturalisation of illegal migrants by fraudulent means. Given the socio-economic complexities of Indian society and politics, soon there may be a debate around the minority rights of the Rohingyas.

In the absence of a law to deal with refugees, their identification and surveillance will become difficult especially when the intelligence agencies have warned the **jihadi terror outfits are looking to exploit the vulnerability of Rohingyas.**

INDIA'S STAND-

As per the United Nations refugee agency, in a span of last two weeks in 2017, almost 300,000 Rohingya have crossed over to Bangladesh from the northern Rakhine state in Myanmar, putting Bangladesh under immense strain and compelling the refugees to find shelter in filthy, unsanitary camps scattered along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border

During Prime Minister's visit to Myanmar, he had expressed his concern at the casualties of security forces as well as other innocent lives.

- He had also urged a solution based on respect for peace, communal harmony, justice, dignity, and democratic values.
- India also offered development assistance in Rakhine in cooperation with the Myanmar government.
- Prime Minister in a joint address to the media in NaiPyi Taw with Myanmar State Counsellor, said that India shared Myanmar's concerns over the Rakhine situation but did not mention anything about alleged human rights violations against the Rohingyas, tens of thousands of who have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, with many thousands spilling over to India.
- We are partners in your concerns over the loss of lives of security forces and innocent people due to the extremist violence in Rakhine state, he said.

SAUBHAGYA YOJANA

The Union Ministry of Power launched had PradhanMantriSahajBijliHarGharYojana – "Saubhagya" in September 2017 with an aim to achieve universal household electrification in all parts of country by providing last mile electricity connectivity to all rural and urban households.

The welfare of the poor is linked to the identity of the NDA government, Prime Minister NarendraModi said on Monday. He was speaking at the launch of a ¹ 16,000 crore scheme, Saubhagya, under which households across the country that have no access to electricity, will be given power connections free of cost.

"Under the PM SahajBijliHarGharYojana (Saubhagya), every household in the country will be given an electricity connection. No price will be charged for the poor to get an electricity connection and the government will go to their houses to give them the connection," Mr. Modi said.

The government will bear the expected ¹ 16,000 crore cost of giving electricity connections to the 4 crore households in the country.

Objective: to provide electricity to all families in India.

Identification of beneficiaries: The government will use Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data to identify the beneficiaries for free electricity connections. Un-electrified households not covered under the SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs 500 which will be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 installments through electricity bill.

Total Outlay: 16,320-crore scheme, the Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) is Rs 12,320 crore. The scheme is being funded to the extent of 60% by central grants, 30% by bank loans and 10% by states.

The scheme primarily benefits rural areas, which have the vast majority of households without power connections. Of the total outlay of Rs 16,320 crore, rural areas will get Rs 14,025 crore. For the urban households the outlay is Rs. 2,295 crore.

Implementation:

1. The Rural Electrification Corporation Limited will remain the nodal agency for the operationalisation of the scheme throughout the country.
2. To ensure on-the-spot registration, mobile applications will be used. While free connections will be provided to below poverty line (BPL) households, even those not covered under this category can avail it by paying Rs500 in 10 instalments with their monthly bill.
3. For those household where the national electricity grid can't reach, households will be provided with solar power packs along with battery banks.
4. Remote hamlets will be powered with solar panels along with five LED lamps, a DC fan, and a plug point along with repair and maintenance for five years
5. There will be no subsidy component for monthly electricity consumption and the Gram Panchayat and public institutions in the rural areas will be authorised to carry out billing and collection tasks which have been pain points for the discoms.
6. States have also been provided with an incentive of 50% of their loan being converted to grants, if the electrification targets are met by 31 December 2018.

ANALYSIS

The objective of the Saubhagya scheme is to “provide energy access to all by last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining un-electrified households in rural as well as urban areas to achieve universal household electrification in the country.” On the face of it, the scheme may only be able to plug the gaps and address the issues of entry barrier, last mile connectivity and release of connections, but it can guarantee neither regular electricity supply nor continuation of those connections in case of non-payment. A free electricity connection may provide some relief as far as the financial burden is concerned. However, expecting poor households to bear the recurring burden of bills as per the prevailing tariff of DISCOMs is unimaginable.

A free electricity connection can ease the financial burden on the poor to some degree, but it will not address the recurring burden of power bills. The aim of improving affordability would require that supply be increased drastically to lower the price paid by retail consumers. Paradoxically, amidst the government’s claims that India is a power-surplus nation, the power generation utilities remain vastly under-utilised. The plant load factor (PLF) of coal and lignite-based plants, an indicator of capacity utilisation of power generation units, has dropped consistently over the decade from 77.5% in 2009-10 to 59.88% in 2016-17, according to data from the Central Electricity Authority. This is due to demand for electricity from State distribution companies dropping in tandem with their deteriorating financial status. The Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY), introduced two years ago to restructure the debt of State distribution agencies, has failed to make enough of a difference to this state of affairs. The outcome is not surprising, given that UDAY has failed to address the root problem of populism in the pricing of electricity. In the absence of the freedom to sell at a profitable price, distribution agencies have had very little incentive to demand more electricity from power generators, as evident in the constantly falling PLF. This in turn holds back investment in power generation units. Saubhagya, unfortunately, does very little to address the fundamentals of India’s crippling power problem.

SUJALAM SUFALAM YOJANA

Linkage of rivers will help farmers to grow more crops and contribute in progress of the country: Vice President and Unveils Plaque for ‘Sujalam Sufalam Yojana’

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that linkage of rivers will help the farmers of our country to grow more crops and raise their earnings and contribute in the progress of the country as a result of increased irrigation facilities. He was addressing the gathering after unveiling the Plaque for the ‘Sujalam Sufalam Yojana’ (Water and Irrigation Projects), in Mehsana, Gujarat.

The Vice President said that there are many rivers in our country, and some of the states are receiving more water and in many other states, farmers are not getting benefits of these rivers. He further said that the Governments have been considering over inter-linking of rivers for decades. But there were many hurdles in its realization and so it took time to implement this concept, he added.

He expressed his happiness that Gujarat Government has given concrete shape to the concept of river linkage and has linked Narmada and Sabarmati rivers, so that more and more farmers are benefitted. He further said that he is fortunate to inaugurate the Plaque for the Project.

Mr. Naidu said that the main sources of the progress of Gujarat are: Agriculture and Industry and every state must pay due attention to both of them. Work for everyone and water for every farm is very important and this was a beautiful dream of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay, he added. There are many public-welfare programmes, specially

irrigation programme already going on in Gujarat. He further said that by making small dams, this state has shown how to preserve rain-water that reaches the farms.

Umbrella scheme of Modernisation of Police Forces

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has given its approval for implementation of umbrella scheme of “Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF)” for years 2017-18 to 2019-20. The financial outlay for the scheme over the three year’s period is Rs.25,060 crore, out of which the Central Government share will be Rs.18,636 crore and the States’ share will be Rs.6,424 crore.

Salient Features:

- o Special provision has been made under the Scheme for internal security, law and order, women security, availability of modern weapons, mobility of police forces, logistics support, hiring of helicopters, upgradation of police wireless, National Satellite Network, CCTNS project, E-prison project etc.
- o Under the umbrella scheme, central budget outlay of Rs.10,132 crore has been earmarked for internal security related expenditure for Jammu & Kashmir, North Eastern States and left wing extremism affected States.
- o Scheme of Special Central Assistance (SCA) for 35 worst LWE affected districts has been introduced with an outlay of Rs.3,000 crore to tackle the issue of underdevelopment in these district.
- o An outlay of Rs.100 crore has been earmarked in the North Eastern States for police infrastructure upgradation, training institutes, investigation facilities etc.
- o Implementation of this scheme would bolster the Government’s ability to address challenges faced in different theatres such as areas affected by LWE, Jammu and Kashmir and North East effectively and undertake development interventions which will catalyze in improving the quality of life in these areas and help combat these challenges effectively at the same time.
- o New initiatives are being introduced to provide assistance to States for upgradation of police infrastructure, forensic science laboratories, institutions and the equipment available with them to plug critical gaps in the criminal justice system. Police Stations will be integrated to set up a national data base of crime and criminals’ records. It will be linked with other pillars of criminal justice system such as ‘prisons, forensic science laboratories and prosecution offices.
- o The umbrella scheme also provides for setting up of a State-of Art forensic science laboratory in Amravati, Andhra Pradesh and upgradation of Sardar Patel Global Centre for Security, Counter Terrorism and Anti Insurgency in Jaipur and Gujarat Forensic Science University in Gandhi Nagar.

It is expected that the umbrella scheme, “Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF)” will go a long way to boost the capability and efficiency of Central and State Police Forces by modernizing them.

Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour (PENCIL) Portal

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh launched the Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour (PENCIL) Portal at the National Conference on Child Labour organised by the Ministry of Labour and

Employment, Government of India here today. The PENCIL is an electronic platform that aims at involving Centre, State, District, Governments, civil society and the general public in achieving the target of child labour free society. Shri Rajnath Singh also launched the Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the enforcement of legal framework against child labour. The SOP is aimed at creating a ready reckoner for trainers, practitioners and monitoring agencies to ensure complete prohibition of child labour and protection of adolescents from hazardous labour ultimately leading to Child Labour Free India.

Shri Rajnath Singh said that ratification of treaties by India in this regard shows our resolve to eradicate child labour in a time-bound manner. He said that only portal will not be able to suffice our efforts, but social awareness is needed in this regard. He quoted the example of special drives undertaken under 'Operation Smile', where 70,000-75,000 children could be saved. He emphasised that for the success of PENCIL Portal also, one month's special drive in the country, even at block levels, is required, so that everybody becomes aware of it and acts in the direction of elimination of child labour. He said that child labour not only has social implications but economic implications also. Appreciating the Ministry of Labour and Employment's efforts in releasing SOPs for enforcement agencies, he said that this will help in the better implementation of the schemes, as many schemes are good at the formation stage, but are not being implemented in an effective manner on the ground due to lack of guidance.

The Minister of State for Labour and Employment said that keeping in mind the overall development of children, the employment of children under the age of 14 years is not allowed under the law for any occupation and for the children between 14-18 years, the employment is not allowed in occupations that are harmful to their physical and mental health. The Labour Minister stated that India ratified the two Core Conventions of International Labour Organization (ILO), Convention 138 regarding admission of age to employment and Convention 182 regarding worst forms of Child Labour in June 2017 which shows our commitment to a child labour free nation.

Cabinet approves Revamped Khelo India Programme

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the revamped Khelo India programme at a cost of Rs.1,756 crore for the period 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Salient features:

Some of the salient features of the Programme include:

- an unprecedented Pan Indian Sports Scholarship scheme, which would cover 1,000 most talented young athletes each year across select sports disciplines.
- Each athlete selected under the scheme shall receive an annual scholarship worth Rs. 5.00 lakh for 8 consecutive years.
- This is the first time ever that a long-term athlete development pathway would be made available to gifted and talented youngsters to excel in competitive sports and will create a pool of highly competitive athletes who can compete to win at the world stage.
- The Programme aims to promote 20 universities across the country as hubs of sporting excellence, which would enable talented sports persons to pursue the dual pathway of education and competitive sports.
- The Programme also aims at creating an active population with healthy life-style.

- The Programme would cover about 200 million children in the age group of 10-18 under a massive national physical fitness drive, which will not only measure the physical fitness of all children in the age group, but also support their fitness related activities.

Impact:

- The power of sport in promoting gender equity and social inclusiveness is also fully recognized and special measures are provided for to achieve these objectives.
- The programme also aims at engaging youth living in disturbed and deprived areas, in sporting activities, to wean them away from unproductive and disruptive activities and mainstream them in the nation-building process.
- The programme strives to raise the standards of competition, both at school and college level, to have maximum access to organized sports competitions.
- It also includes the use of latest user-friendly technology in all aspects of sports promotion such as, use of mobile apps for dissemination of sports training; National Sports Talent Search portal for talent identification; interactive website for indigenous sports; GIS based information system for locating and using sports infrastructure, etc.
- This programme strives to promote “Sports for All” as well as “Sports for Excellence.”

The Code on Wages Bill 2017

As part of labour law reforms, the Government has undertaken the exercise of rationalisation of the 38 Labour Acts by framing 4 labour codes viz Code on Wages, Code on Industrial Relations, Code on Social Security and Code on occupational safety, health and working conditions.

1. The Code on Wages Bill 2017 has been introduced in Lok Sabha on 10.08.2017 and it subsumes 4 existing Laws, viz. the Minimum Wages Act, 1948; the Payment of Wages Act, 1936; the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965; and the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
2. At present, the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act and the Payment of Wages Act do not cover substantial number of workers, as the applicability of both these Acts is restricted to the Scheduled Employments / Establishments. However, the new Code on Wages will ensure minimum wages to one and all and timely payment of wages to all employees irrespective of the sector of employment without any wage ceiling.
3. A concept of statutory National Minimum Wage for different geographical areas has been introduced. It will ensure that no State Government fixes the minimum wage below the National Minimum Wages for that particular area as notified by the Central Government.
4. Penalties for different types of violations under this Code have been rationalized.

UJALA scheme launched in Melaka, Malaysia

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) , under Ministry of Power, Government of India has launched UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All) Scheme in the State of Melaka, Malaysia. Under this

scheme, each household in Melaka will get 10 high quality 9-watt LED bulbs at a cost of only RM 10, which is a special price and is almost half of what in begin offered in the market.

The UJALA programme has been one of the prime achievements of Government of India in promoting and executing the concept of energy efficiency. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Sh. Narendra Modi on January 5, 2015 had launched the world's largest and most extensive LED distribution programme, UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All). In this initiative, the nodal organisation, EESL, had undertaken the task of setting up phase-wise LED distribution centers across the nation to provide people with affordable LED bulbs and energy efficient appliances.

Currently, over 25-crore LED bulbs have been distributed under the UJALA scheme in India, which are resulting in 33,828 mn kWh of energy savings per year.

Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign

On September 15, 2017, the President of India launched a nationwide sanitation campaign "Swachhta Hi Seva" at Iswarganj village in Kanpur. The President administered the Swachhta Hi Seva Pledge whereby the Nation resolved to create a clean healthy and new India. Addressing the gathering the President said "India is fighting a decisive battle for cleanliness and hygiene. Cleanliness is not the responsibility of only sanitation personnel and government departments; it is a multi-stakeholder national movement."

The aim of the Swachh Bharat Mission is to achieve a clean and open defecation free India by October 2, 2019. The objectives are generating demand for toilets leading to their construction and sustained use by all household members, promoting better hygiene behavior amongst the population and improving cleanliness by initiating solid and liquid waste management projects. The financial allocations under the Swachh Bharat Mission increased from Rs.2850 crores in 2014-15 to Rs.6525 crores in 2015-16, to Rs.10,500 crores in 2016-17, to Rs. 14000 crores in 2017-18.

The Swachh Bharat Mission sought to reform the sanitation sector with the primary focus being on behavioral changes as the fundamental tool for achievement of Open Defecation Free outcomes. An innovative monitoring and evaluation system was put in place. The Swachh Sarvekshan was conducted for rural India and revealed that Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) and Sidhudurg (Maharashtra) were the cleanest districts in India. The Swachh Sarvekshan assessed 22 Hill districts and 53 Plain areas. National level monitors were hired to carry out sample-based checks of sanitation coverage and open defecation free status across the country. The Swachh Bharat Mission represents a national movement with diverse stakeholders comprising of Central Ministries, State Governments, local institutions, non-government and semi-government agencies, corporates, NGO's, faith organizations and media.

The Vice President of India said that Swachh Bharat Mission is at a tipping point from where a major is expected to spiral it into a massive Jan Andolan – a people's movement. The Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign seeks to mobilize people to come out and get directly involved with the Swachh Bharat Mission by offering shramdaan for swachhta in the fortnight leading upto Gandhi Jayanti.
