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Topic : Why India Needs to Clean Its Air

Relevance : GS Paper 3 Environment and ecology

Source : The Hindu

Context :

Air pollution in India is not just a winter issue or a Delhi-centric problem. It is a **year-round, nationwide crisis** that affects health, economy, and quality of life. Millions suffer from respiratory diseases, children miss school due to smog, and Indian cities frequently top global pollution rankings.

However, tackling this crisis is not just about advanced technology. It requires a deeper understanding of **structural issues**, such as weak governance, socio-economic disparities, outdated infrastructure, and behavioural patterns. Real change comes from ground-level efforts — by municipal workers, planners, engineers, and local leaders.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

- **Launched in 2019**, NCAP is India's national-level strategy to improve air quality.

DEL-HYD-B'LORE-PUNE-TPT

FULL CONTEXT

Ajay Singh Nagpure

India's air pollution crisis is not just a seasonal inconvenience. It's a persistent, silent pandemic that chokes our lungs every winter and quietly lingers throughout the year. Hospitals overflow with respiratory cases, schools shut down, cities disappear under layers of smog, and Indian metros regularly top global pollution rankings. Given the scale of this crisis, it's worth asking: what is India actually doing to clean its air? While initiatives like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), Bharat VI, the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), and targeted efforts to phase out coal-burning industries in the National Capital Region mark important progress, the national response remains fragmented and slow-moving. Without stronger alignment and faster implementation, transformative change may remain out of reach.

Tuning in to ground realities

The challenge begins with how India understands air pollution. It's often seen as a technical problem when in reality it's a complex structural issue shaped by governance capacity, demographic pressure, socio-economic disparity, behavioural norms, and entrenched economic systems. Scientists play a vital role in diagnosing air quality — like physicians identifying symptoms — but lasting solutions depend on those working on the ground: municipal officers, planners, engineers, and community leaders. These actors operate within tight budgets, outdated infrastructure, and competing local demands. Strengthening their capacity and aligning mandates with air quality goals is essential for sustained change.

This complexity becomes especially relevant when considering India's goal to reduce PM_{2.5} levels by 2026 to 40% of what it was in 2017. While ambitious and necessary, the target risks falling short if it isn't mindful of on-ground realities. Consider transportation, for instance. It's not enough to say "vehicles cause pollution." We need to ask: what types of vehicles are on the road? What fuel do they use? How old are they? How far do they travel? How bad is traffic? Without this level of detail, it's difficult to craft realistic, actionable plans for local governments. To turn national goals into real progress, we must connect them to the everyday activities that actually drive emissions.

Proactive programs

While China is often called a success story, it came at a steep price — ₹2 lakh crore over five years for urban centres. India's NCAP budget is less than 1% of that. However, if we include allied programs like PMUY (₹15,128 crore), the program for Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India or FAME II (₹10,795 crore), Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (₹1.4 lakh crore), and NCAP itself (₹1,542 crore), a broader ecosystem of air quality financing becomes apparent. They target emission sources and deserve recognition as part of India's clean air strategy.

The NCAP continues to struggle with how its funds are allocated and how progress is measured. It relies heavily on ambient air quality data, which is often affected by weather and geography, making short-term improvements hard to detect. For example, initiatives like PMUY and waste-burning controls have reduced



For a clear future: An anti-smog gun spraying water to fight air pollution and dust at Kartavya Path, New Delhi on March 31. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

emissions in several areas, but these gains may not reflect in pollution readings, creating a misleading sense of stagnation. Shifting to activity-based metrics — such as the number of stoves replaced or diesel buses retired — would offer a clearer picture of impact and strengthen accountability. Realigning metrics alone isn't enough. Local governments also need access to high-resolution, open-source data on emissions-generating activities: where waste is burned, which households use solid fuels, where construction is active, and which roads face the heaviest traffic. Without such data, air pollution remains an abstract issue, disconnected from daily governance. This data gap directly affects how NCAP funds are used. Between 2019 and 2023, only 60% of the funds released were utilised, reflecting not a lack of intent but institutional misalignment. Air quality continues to be treated as a parallel concern rather than a core municipal function.

To shift from intent to impact, India needs a phased, data-driven approach. Phase I: build local emissions profiles to identify the biggest pollution sources; Phase II: link funding directly to targeted actions based on that data; and Phase III: track reductions in emissions, not just pollution concentrations, to measure real

progress. This shift from passive monitoring to proactive management mirrors how meaningful change happens on the ground.

Guarding against optics

However, as India adopts more digital tools, it must avoid falling into the "Western trap" — overreliance on high-tech, urban-centric data and solutions without addressing basic pollution sources. Smog towers, real-time apportionment, and AI dashboards may appear innovative but offer little value if burning biomass and the use of old industrial processes and polluting vehicles go unchecked. Cities like London and Los Angeles rolled out advanced sophisticated technologies only after decades of systemic reform. India must sequence its strategies correctly.

This misalignment also risks elite capture. Urban hubs may get cutting-edge tools while rural and informal sectors — responsible for a large share of emissions — are neglected. Worse, these tools may distract from structural reforms, shifting attention to optics over outcomes. More data does not equal more action if local agencies lack authority or the resources to use it.

A key fix is distinguishing between academic research and solution-focused

implementation. While long-term innovation is important, policymakers need short-term, scalable models they can act on. India must create separate funding streams: one for research and another for immediate, on-ground interventions. Otherwise, we risk producing more papers than progress.

What are other countries doing?

Global examples offer guidance without imitation. China closed coal plants. Brazil used community-led waste systems. California reinvested pollution revenue in poor communities. London banned coal-use before launching sensors. Each succeeded by following a path grounded in its context. India must do the same — innovate programmes which are federalism-friendly, subsidy-driven, and tailored to its informal economy.

Ultimately, India's clean air future will be shaped not by dashboards but by people, partnerships, and purpose. We must fix the plumbing before painting the walls. Clean air must be a right for all, not a privilege for a few. Securing that right will take more than promises. It will take coordination, courage, and a commitment to act.

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PRAGNYA BHARATHI: Detailed News Analysis (DNA)

- **Main goal:** Reduce PM2.5 and PM10 levels by **40% by 2026**, using 2017 levels as a baseline.
- **131 non-attainment cities** (those not meeting national air quality standards) are covered under NCAP.
- It focuses on:
 - Expanding air quality monitoring stations
 - Creating city action plans
 - Strengthening local governance for implementation

Challenges with NCAP:

- Heavy reliance on pollution data that can vary with weather.
- Limited use of funds (only 60% utilized between 2019-2023).
- Lack of detailed local data about real pollution sources (like waste burning or construction).
- Funds are not always linked to actual emission reductions.

Other Key Government Initiatives

1. **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)**
 - Provides LPG connections to poor households to reduce biomass burning indoors.
2. **Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME-II)**
 - Supports electric vehicles to reduce vehicular emissions.
3. **Bharat Stage VI Emission Norms**
 - Introduced in 2020, they ensure cleaner fuels and engines.
4. **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**
 - Helps reduce open burning of garbage and improve waste management.
5. **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)**
 - Formed to oversee pollution control efforts in Delhi-NCR and surrounding areas.

▼
The challenge begins with how India understands air pollution. It's often seen as a technical problem when in reality it's a complex structural issue shaped by governance capacity, demographic pressure, socio-economic disparity, behavioural norms, and entrenched economic systems.

▼
Local governments need access to high-resolution, open-source data on emissions-generating activities: where waste is burned, which households use solid fuels, where construction is active, and which roads face the heaviest traffic.

▼
As India adopts more digital tools, it must avoid falling into the "Western trap"—overreliance on high-tech, urban-centric data and solutions without addressing basic pollution sources

The Real Need: Ground-Level Focus and Smarter Metrics**Instead of depending only on air monitors and dashboards, India needs to:**

- **Track real actions** (e.g., number of old buses retired, LPG stoves distributed)
- **Give local governments access to detailed pollution data**
- **Avoid elite or urban-only solutions** (like smog towers or high-tech apps)
- **Strengthen local planning and capacity**

Global Examples India Can Learn From

- **China:** Closed coal plants aggressively

- **Brazil:** Used community-led waste collection
- **California:** Reinvested pollution penalties in poor neighbourhoods
- **London:** Banned coal before installing air sensors

India's critical efforts to tackle air pollution could worsen warming

Regions that cleaned their air in the late 20th century have experienced a greater increase in warming trends over time while more populated urban areas with low human development indices have experienced lower levels of warming – due to the masking effect of pollution

Neelima Vallangi

Rapidly reducing aerosol emissions, which are part of air pollution, without concurrently reducing greenhouse gas emissions could expose a large fraction of the world's most vulnerable people to a sudden acceleration of warming and extreme heat in highly polluted regions like India. Researchers warned as much in a study published in November 2024 in *Geophysical Research Letters*.

The analysis found regions that cleaned their air in the late 20th century have experienced a greater increase in warming trends over time, while more populated urban areas with low human development indices have experienced lower levels of warming – due to the masking effect of pollution.

According to Aditya Sengupta, a graduate researcher at the University of Melbourne and first author of the study, abruptly halting the emission of aerosols can also increase the rate of warming on shorter time scales.

The study is particularly relevant for India, which is currently struggling to improve air quality on one hand while trying to stave off the worst of climate change on the other.

Greenhouse gases vs. aerosols

Global warming is caused by the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and has been known to intensify temperature and rainfall extremes. Aerosols can counteract the impact of greenhouse gases to some extent.

This is because, while greenhouse gases trap heat and warm the earth's surface, aerosols such as sulphates and nitrates scatter solar radiation, preventing it from reaching the ground and rendering a cooling effect. Aerosols also affect the water cycle.

Greenhouse gases are also well mixed in the atmosphere. As a result, their effects, including knock-on ones on the climate, can be felt around the planet. On the other hand, the concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere varies by location and time. Greenhouse gases are also more long-lived – carbon dioxide can persist in the atmosphere without breaking down for centuries – whereas aerosols live for a few days to weeks at a time.

The consequences of changes in the atmosphere's aerosol load can thus be felt almost immediately.

Thermal power

According to Govindasamy Bala, professor at the Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, growing economies and industrialisation go hand in hand with aerosol and fossil-fuel emissions.

In India, thermal power plants generate roughly 70% of the country's electricity by burning coal, which contains some sulphur. "So before the flue gas [exhaust gas from the combustion process] is released to the atmosphere, you have to take out sulphur dioxide at the source to reduce air pollution," Mr. Bala explained.

Sulphate aerosols, which form through the oxidation of sulphur dioxide, are



Thermal power plants generate 70% of India's electricity by burning coal, which also releases sulphur that can go on to form reflective sulphate aerosols. AP

highly reflective and make up 50-60% of the overall aerosol composition in India, in addition to black carbon, dust, and other pollutants, according to Mr. Bala.

Invisible offset

"[O]ur numbers show, if it were not for aerosols, we would experience much greater warming over India," Krishna AchutaRao, dean and professor at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences, IIT-Delhi, said.

According to him, India warmed by about 0.54° C between 1906 and 2005, with the estimated warming due to greenhouse gases being about 2° C and the cooling offset from other anthropogenic factors about 1.5° C. While most of the cooling is likely from aerosols released by human industrial activity, some cooling is also likely from irrigation, Mr. AchutaRao added.

According to the first-ever assessment of climate change over India published by the Ministry of Earth Sciences in 2020, the country's average temperature rose by around 0.7° C between 1901 and 2018, largely due to greenhouse gas-induced warming, but was partially offset by anthropogenic aerosols and changes in land use. To compare, overall long-term global warming is currently about 1.3° C above pre-industrial times.

Aerosols and rain

Aerosols' effects on rainfall are another matter. "In general, the temperature effect is fairly straightforward: remove aerosols, and it gets warmer," Mr. AchutaRao said. "With precipitation, things are further complicated."

According to Mr. Bala, the global mean cooling is about 0.6° C in the industrial period due to aerosols. But he said, citing a recent Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) report, that "this



Achieving net-zero carbon emissions is not the end of the story, policymakers should focus on adaptation policies for vulnerable areas, particularly the Indo-Gangetic plains, where the highest aerosol loading is found

cooling is unevenly distributed – in the northern hemisphere, it is 0.9° and in the southern hemisphere it is about 0.3° C. Because of this larger cooling in the northern hemisphere, the actual aerosol effect is a slight reduction in Indian monsoon rainfall."

Many people would like to understand what aerosols emitted by India are doing to India, but the remote effects of aerosols are also important to consider, he added. For example, a May 2024 study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reported that when China cut its aerosol emissions, extreme heat wave events in the Pacific Ocean, along the west coast of North America, got worse.

Likewise, according to Mr. Bala's ongoing research, any substantial increase in aerosols over India could negatively affect the hydrological cycle and reduce the amount of monsoon rainfall. Understanding this process is an active area of study worldwide.

Net-zero not the end

Both aerosol pollution and greenhouse gas-related climate pollution are mainly due to large-scale industrial activity. Greenhouse gas-induced warming increases the risk of extreme heat, aerosols cause respiratory ailments, creating a compounding effect on vulnerable populations, Mr. Sengupta said.

The study has found that cutting both

will also require policies to support already at-risk populations that will be affected by the sudden rise in warming in the short term.

"Achieving net-zero carbon emissions would not be the end of the story, and policymakers should focus on long-term adaptation policies for the vulnerable parts of India, particularly people residing in the Indo-Gangetic plains, where the highest aerosol loading is found," Mr. Sengupta added. But because aerosol distribution is highly regional, it is difficult to exactly predict how specific places in India will be affected when (and if) we clean up aerosols, Mr. AchutaRao said.

Experts suggested the surest step would be to develop better heat action plans. Delhi-based research organisation Sustainable Futures Collaborative recently reported that few of the heat action plans of nine cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Faridabad, Gwalior, Kota, Ludhiana, Meerut, and Surat – included long-term action and that even those were poorly targeted. If and when aerosols are removed from the atmosphere, the heat stress in these cities could worsen.

"While cleaning the air might accelerate ongoing warming by unmasking the greenhouse gas-induced warming, it could be beneficial in terms of increased rainfall over India. These trade-offs should be considered when assessing the effects of aerosols on our complex climate system," Mr. Bala added.

That said, all the experts agreed the immediate benefits to human health from reducing air pollution far outweighed any adverse consequences due to higher heat or disrupted rainfall.

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India must design context-specific, inclusive, and scalable solutions, especially for its informal economy.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. Which of the following statements regarding India's efforts to combat air pollution are correct?

1. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) aims to reduce PM2.5 and PM10 levels by 40% by 2026 using 2019 as the base year.
2. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) helps reduce indoor air pollution by promoting LPG usage.
3. The FAME-II scheme promotes electric mobility to reduce industrial emissions.
4. The NCAP covers only Tier-1 cities with a population of over 1 million.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- a) 1 and 3 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 2 only

Answer: b) 2 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** NCAP targets a 40% reduction in PM2.5 and PM10 **using 2017** as the base year, not 2019.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** PMUY promotes LPG to reduce indoor air pollution from biomass burning.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect:** FAME-II promotes electric vehicles mainly to reduce **vehicular** emissions, not industrial emissions.
- **Statement 4 is incorrect:** NCAP covers **131 non-attainment cities**, not just Tier-1 cities, and includes smaller cities too.

Mains Model Question

Q. Despite multiple initiatives like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), India continues to face a severe air pollution crisis. Discuss the key challenges in addressing air pollution and suggest measures for effective implementation of clean air policies.

Air pollution in India has evolved from a seasonal phenomenon to a persistent public health emergency. Indian cities regularly rank among the world's most polluted, with serious consequences on health, economy, and environment.

The **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** was launched in 2019 with a goal to reduce **PM2.5 and PM10 levels by 40% by 2026**, using **2017 as the base year**. It covers **131 non-attainment cities**, focusing on improving air quality monitoring, public awareness, and city-specific action plans.

However, implementation faces several **challenges**:

1. **Fragmented Approach**: Multiple agencies work in silos without proper coordination.
2. **Data Limitations**: Air quality measurement is mostly limited to ambient data, which fluctuates due to weather, making it hard to track real progress.
3. **Funding Gaps and Utilisation**: Between 2019-2023, only 60% of released NCAP funds were utilised.
4. **Over-reliance on Tech Solutions**: Smog towers and AI dashboards often overshadow core reforms like waste management and vehicular emission controls.
5. **Rural and Informal Neglect**: Policies remain urban-centric, while rural biomass burning and informal sectors are major contributors.

Several **complementary schemes** like **PM Ujjwala Yojana, FAME-II, Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)** and stricter fuel norms (Bharat Stage VI) have helped reduce emissions at the source. Yet, outcomes remain suboptimal due to lack of ground-level capacity and behavioural change.

Way Forward:

- Build **local emissions inventories** to identify real sources.
- Shift to **activity-based metrics** (e.g., number of old vehicles scrapped).
- Strengthen **local governance** with technical and financial autonomy.
- Ensure **inclusion of rural and informal sectors**.
- Promote **community-led solutions** and behavioural change.

India must shift from optics to outcomes. Clean air should be treated as a **basic right**, and not a luxury.

Topic : Rural development in India

Relevance : GS Paper 2 Polity and Governance

Source : The Hindu

Context :

The Supreme Court, while hearing a plea to mandate one public library in every village, emphasized that **basic necessities like hygiene, education, and healthcare** must take precedence over other developmental

initiatives in rural areas.

Justice Surya Kant remarked that while libraries are important for spreading Constitutional values and knowledge, a **person struggling for food, water, or basic healthcare may not benefit immediately from a library**. The Court recognized financial constraints but stated that **at least 10–15% of States' budgets should be allocated to improve basic rural infrastructure**.

Core Issues Highlighted:

1. **Healthcare access** in rural areas remains limited due to a shortage of doctors, facilities, and infrastructure.
2. **Sanitation and hygiene** issues continue, especially related to drinking water, waste management, and open defecation.
3. **Educational gaps** persist due to lack of schools, teacher absenteeism, and inadequate digital access.

Government Initiatives Addressing These Issues:

1. Healthcare Initiatives:

- **Ayushman Bharat (2018):**
 - Two components: Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and PM-JAY.
 - Targets over 50 crore beneficiaries with ₹5 lakh insurance cover.
 - HWCs aim to provide **primary care services** in rural areas.
- **National Health Mission (NHM):**
 - Focus on rural (NRHM) and urban health (NUHM).
 - Includes training of **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)** and establishment of Sub-Centres and PHCs.
- **eSanjeevani (Telemedicine):**
 - Free online health consultation for rural patients, reducing dependency on physical infrastructure.

2. Hygiene & Sanitation:

- **Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G):**
 - Aimed at ending open defecation.

Ensure education, hygiene, healthcare in rural areas: SC

Top court dismisses plea to direct States to set up at least one public library in every village; Bench says 10% to 15% of budgetary allocations must go towards improving basic rural infrastructure

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday remarked that ensuring hygiene, education and healthcare was the most important path towards a robust rural India.

A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant made the oral observation while hearing a petition filed by the Mundona Rural Development Foundation to direct the States to set up at least one public library in every village in the country.

But Justice Kant said libraries, though laudable, may not be what rural areas need the most. "If you want to improve rural India, hygiene, education and health have to be ensured... A person who is starving, does he go to a library," Justice Kant asked the petitioner.

The judge said the States usually quote "financial constraints" as a reason for not spending more to improve hygiene, education and healthcare in rural

Direct States to set up at least one public library in every village in the country.

PETITION BY MUNDONA RURAL DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

A person who is starving, does he go to a library?... Have you looked at the availability of schools, teachers and mid-day meals for children, the water supply to villages... Has anybody done these surveys?

JUSTICE SURYA KANT
Supreme Court Judge



areas. The court said at least 10% to 15% of the States' budgetary allocations must go towards improving basic rural infrastructure to realise the ambition of a fully developed country.

'Priorities differ'

Justice Kant said priorities differed: while the petitioner believed public libraries were essential in villages, others might want money to be spent on healthcare.

The Supreme Court agreed that libraries did indeed reach out to small children, providing them with "perspectives on subjects like history, culture, Constitutional values, rights and responsibilities of the citizenry". Libraries also reached out to people living in inaccessible areas, infusing them with democratic and Constitutional values, Justice Kant said.

"But equally important is the means to provide them adequate healthcare,

hygiene and education," Justice Kant noted.

Justice Kant asked the petitioner NGO whether it had done a survey on the health conditions in villages or the condition of drinking water in them. "Have you looked at the availability of schools, teachers and mid-day meals for children, the water supply to villages... Has anybody done these surveys?" the Bench asked counsel for the petitioner.

Policymakers to decide

The court said it would be left to the wisdom of the policymakers in the government as to which best to prioritise, public libraries or basic infrastructure, in rural areas.

Disposing of the petition, the Bench urged the States to look into the issue and take steps within the limit of their resources. It expressed the hope that the States would consider taking effective measures, including the promotion of e-libraries, even through corporate social responsibility funds.

PRAGNYA BHARATHI: Detailed News Analysis (DNA)

- Over 11 crore toilets constructed since 2014.
- Phase II focuses on **solid and liquid waste management** in rural areas.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (2019):**
 - Goal: Tap water supply to every rural household by 2024.
 - Focuses on **safe drinking water** and village-level water testing labs.

3. Education in Rural Areas:

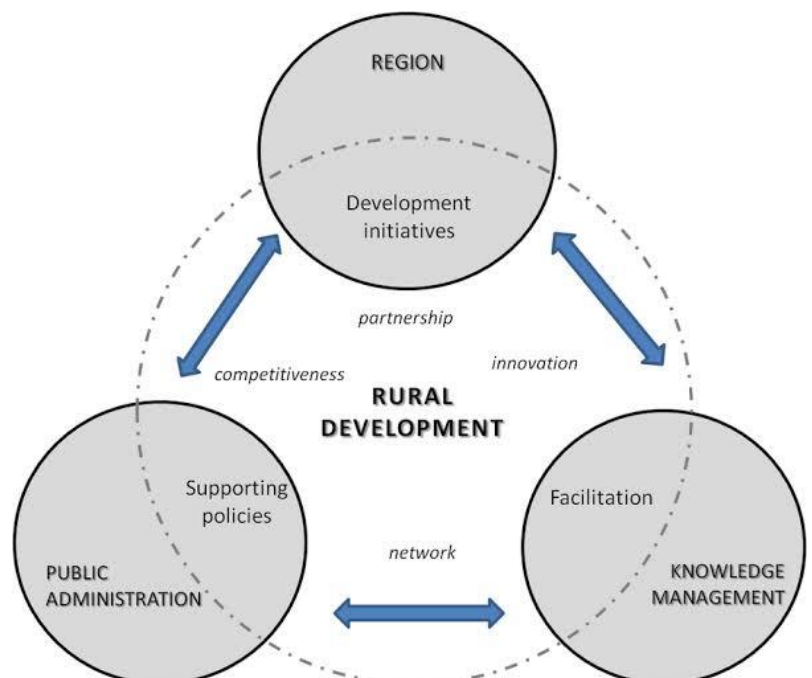
- **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (now part of Samagra Shiksha):**
 - Ensures **universal elementary education**.
 - Addresses teacher training, school infrastructure, and inclusive education.
- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan:**
 - Integrates school education from pre-primary to Class 12.
 - Emphasis on digital infrastructure, composite school grants, and holistic learning.
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (now PM POSHAN):**
 - Provides **nutritious meals** to students, helping with both learning and health.
- **Digital India Initiative:**
 - E-learning platforms like **DIKSHA** and **SWAYAM** cater to rural students.
 - **PM e-Vidya** launched during COVID for multi-platform learning.

**How the Government Can Improve:****1. Rural Healthcare:****Challenges:**

- Lack of infrastructure (Sub-Centres, PHCs, CHCs)
- Doctor shortages in rural areas
- Low awareness and preventive care

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Strengthen Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs):** Accelerate setting up of HWCs with diagnostic facilities and trained staff.
- **Incentivize Rural Posting:** Provide financial incentives and career growth opportunities for doctors serving in rural areas.
- **Mobile Health Units & Telemedicine:** Expand services like **eSanjeevani** to remote areas with poor hospital access.



- **Health Awareness Campaigns:** Use ASHA and ANM workers for regular community-level awareness about hygiene, nutrition, and disease prevention.

2. Rural Education:

Challenges:

- Inadequate number of schools and poor infrastructure
- High dropout rates, especially among girls
- Digital divide and poor internet access

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Upgrade School Infrastructure:** Ensure electricity, toilets (especially for girls), drinking water, and functional classrooms.
- **Address Teacher Shortages:** Recruit trained teachers and ensure accountability through regular monitoring.
- **Bridge Digital Divide:** Promote smart classrooms, tablets, solar-powered devices, and local language content via platforms like DIKSHA.
- **Community Participation:** Strengthen School Management Committees (SMCs) and involve parents in school governance.



The Economic Impact of Swachh Bharat Mission

International Research Findings:



3. Hygiene & Sanitation:

Challenges:

- Open defecation still persists in pockets
- Poor waste management in rural areas
- Lack of clean drinking water in many villages

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **SBM Phase-II Expansion:** Focus on **sustainability** by ensuring toilet usage and investing in **solid-liquid waste management** systems.
- **Monitoring through Panchayats:** Use Gram Panchayats to maintain sanitation assets and create local sanitation plans.
- **Water Testing and Infrastructure:** Strengthen **Jal Jeevan Mission** with community training in water testing, and provide piped water in all villages.
- **Behaviour Change Campaigns:** Intensify IEC (Information, Education, Communication) to promote cleanliness, handwashing, and waste segregation.

**Cross-cutting Reforms:**

- **Increase Budget Allocation:** As SC suggested, allocate **10–15% of the State Budget** to rural development.
- **Leverage CSR and PPP:** Encourage **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** funding for libraries, e-health, and digital education tools.
- **Integrated Planning:** Align central schemes (NHM, SBM, PM-POSHAN) with State-level implementation for better synergy.
- **Use of Local Governance:** Empower **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** with funds, functions, and functionaries.

Prelims Practice Question:

Q. With reference to rural development in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs) to all rural households.
2. Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G) Phase II focuses solely on toilet construction in rural areas.
3. The Ayushman Bharat initiative includes Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) to strengthen primary healthcare in rural India.
4. The Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) platform provides offline

Which of the statements given above are **correct**?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1, 3 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Correct Answer: B. 1, 3 and 4 only

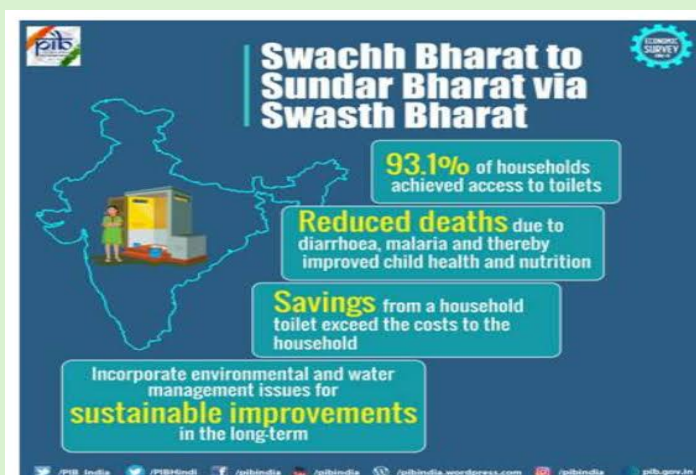
Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Correct:** Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide **Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTCs)** to every rural household by 2024.
- **Statement 2 – Incorrect:** **SBM-G Phase II** goes beyond toilet construction. It focuses on **solid and liquid waste management**, sustainability, and ODF+ (Open Defecation Free Plus) status.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** **Ayushman Bharat** includes **HWCs** to provide comprehensive primary healthcare services in rural areas.
- **Statement 4 – Correct:** **DIKSHA** is a government platform providing **offline and online educational content**, including **regional languages**, for both students and teachers.

Mains Model Question:

Q. Despite multiple schemes and constitutional provisions, rural India continues to lag in basic infrastructure. Critically examine the current status of hygiene, education, and healthcare in rural areas and suggest how the government can address these gaps. (Answer in 300 words)

Rural India forms the backbone of the nation, yet it continues to face persistent challenges in hygiene, education, and healthcare. While the government has implemented schemes such as Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the National Rural Health Mission, the impact on ground remains uneven due to issues in implementation, resource constraints, and governance.



Hygiene in rural areas is marred by inadequate sanitation facilities, improper waste management, and unsafe drinking water. Although the Swachh Bharat Mission led to a significant increase in toilet coverage, behaviour change and sustainable practices remain limited. Education too faces a crisis with high dropout rates, insufficient infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and poor learning outcomes.

Schemes like Samagra Shiksha and the Mid-Day Meal Programme have improved enrolment, but quality of education is still a major concern. Rural healthcare infrastructure suffers from shortage of doctors, lack of diagnostic facilities, and inadequate primary health centres. Despite the Ayushman Bharat initiative and Health and Wellness Centres, accessibility and quality of care in remote areas remain subpar.



To bridge these gaps, the government must adopt an integrated, data-driven approach. Adequate budgetary allocations, especially the recommended 10–15% towards rural infrastructure, are essential. Strengthening local governance, ensuring accountability in service delivery, and promoting convergence between departments are crucial. Use of technology for monitoring and capacity-building at the grassroots can significantly enhance outcomes.

Additionally, public-private partnerships and CSR initiatives can play a complementary role in supplementing state efforts.

A resilient rural infrastructure is not merely about physical development but about empowering citizens with dignity, health, and knowledge. The focus should be on sustained, inclusive interventions that move beyond symbolism and deliver real, measurable improvements in the lives of rural Indians.

Topic : Global Trade Relations and Tariffs

Relevance : GS Paper 3 Economy

Source : Indian Express

Context :

A major development in global trade relations, wherein U.S. President Donald Trump has imposed steep

reciprocal tariffs ranging from 10% to 49% on imports from various countries. India, despite being in bilateral trade talks with the U.S., has been hit with a 27% tariff.

India holds fire as Trump slaps tariffs

Trump announces tariffs ranging from 10% to 49%; India hit with 27% tariff

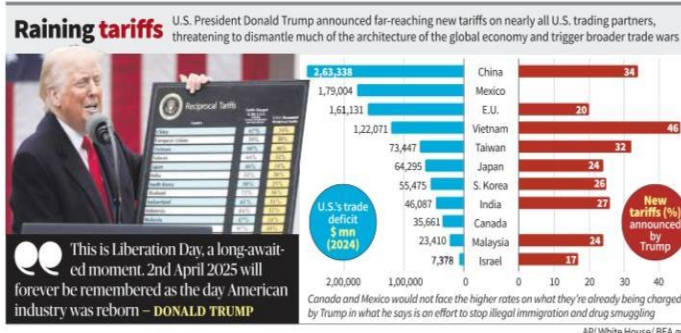
India's Commerce Ministry 'examining the implications', will engage with stakeholders

EU, China, Canada vow countermeasures; Japan, South Korea term tariffs regrettable

Jagriti Chandra
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

U.S. President Donald Trump launched a full-scale trade war on Thursday, announcing massive "reciprocal tariffs", ranging from 10% to 49%, on U.S. imports from its trading partners around the world. India was not spared and was hit with a 27% tariff on its exports to the U.S. despite ongoing talks for a trade agreement.

The tariffs sparked warnings of reprisal from China and the European Union, though India's reaction was muted. Global markets plunged in response, from Japan's Nikkei which lost 4% and European markets that dropped more than 2% each, to India's Sensex, that shaved more than 300 points, while the Nifty



This is Liberation Day, a long-awaited moment. 2nd April 2025 will forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn – DONALD TRUMP

dropped as well. In the U.S., the Dow Jones fell over 3% in the first hour of trading, while the Nasdaq crashed 4%.

Despite weeks of ongoing negotiations between U.S. Trade Representatives and Indian officials over a Bilateral Trade Agreement, Mr. Trump announced that India – which he claimed

imposed duties of 52% on the U.S. – would face a "discounted" tariff of 27% on its exports to the U.S.

The tariff hikes, which Mr. Trump has said for weeks would herald April 2 as "Liberation Day" for the U.S., were considerably broader and higher than experts had predicted.

The U.S. President in-

voiced his authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 to address large and persistent U.S. goods trade deficits, which he called a "national emergency".

He announced a 10% baseline tariff on all countries, which will take effect from April 5. An individual-

ised reciprocal higher tariff on the countries with which the U.S. has the largest trade deficits will also be imposed from April 9.

India's official response to the announcement was subdued.

An official statement issued on Thursday morning said that the Commerce Ministry is "carefully exa-

mining the implications of the various measures", adding that it is engaged with all stakeholders, including Indian industry and exporters, to assess the impact of the tariffs. It also said, however, that it was studying "opportunities that may arise due to this new development", noting that India "values its Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" with the U.S., and will continue BTA talks aimed at raising bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030.

India's comments were in contrast to other U.S. trading partners who had been slapped with tariffs. The European Union, China, and Canada threatened that there would be "countermeasures". Japanese Trade Minister Yoji Muto called the reciprocal tariffs "extremely regrettable".

CONTINUED ON
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has been hit with a 27% tariff. Trump's justification for these tariffs rests on the claim that many countries, including India, impose disproportionately high duties on American goods, which he considers a threat to the U.S. economy and workforce.

The move is legally underpinned by the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)** of

1977, which the U.S. President invoked to treat trade imbalances as a national emergency. While India's response has been restrained, describing the move as under examination and expressing a commitment to continue trade dialogue, other affected nations such as **China, the EU, and Canada** have indicated strong opposition and potential countermeasures.

Impact on India:

- Export Sectors Affected:** Key sectors like **gems and jewellery**, which send over \$10 billion worth of goods annually to the U.S., are expected to be hit hard. The increased cost for American buyers could reduce demand for Indian exports.
- Trade Negotiation Setback:** The tariff action comes amid negotiations on a **Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)**. Imposition of tariffs during talks may erode trust and make future trade discussions more complex.
- Competitiveness Shift:** Although India faces a 27% tariff, countries like **Vietnam (46%)** and **Sri Lanka (44%)** are hit harder. This provides India some relative **competitive edge**, especially in textiles and light manufacturing exports.
- Market Reaction:** Indian stock markets fell, mirroring global trends. The Sensex dropped 300+ points. This reflects investor anxiety over rising global protectionism and its impact on economic stability.

U.S. tariffs will 'devastate' Indian economy, says Rahul

Cong. leader seeks answer from government on its response to the 'sudden' decision by its 'ally' on China, he says that before ties can be normalised, it should return the land it had taken over

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, said in the Lok Sabha on Thursday that reciprocal tariffs imposed by the U.S. would "completely devastate" the Indian economy, and sought an answer from the government on its response to the "sudden" decision by its "ally".

Speaking during Zero Hour, Mr. Gandhi said China had taken over 4,000 square kilometres of Indian territory. While the Congress was not against a move towards normalisation of relations with China, the land should first be returned, he added.

Mr. Gandhi contrasted the government's approach, stating that on the one hand, it had allowed China to take "our land", while on the other, India's "ally" U.S. has suddenly decided to impose tariffs on us.

He demanded that the Centre provide answers regarding "what is it doing about our land and about these tariffs that our ally has imposed on us". He alleged that the BJP tended



Voicing concerns: Rahul Gandhi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

to "bow its head in front of every foreigner".

Mr. Gandhi warned that the tariffs imposed by the U.S. were going to "completely devastate" the Indian economy, particularly sectors such as the automotive industry, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture.

Recalling an anecdote, Mr. Gandhi told the Lok Sabha, "Somebody once asked Indira Gandhiji, 'In the matter of foreign policy do you lean left or do you lean right?' and Indira Gandhiji answered, 'I don't lean left or right, I stand straight. I am Indian and I stand straight.'"

He contrasted this with what he claimed was the

philosophy of the BJP and the RSS. "When they are asked whether they lean left or right, they say, 'No, no, no, we bow our head in front of every foreigner that comes in front of us,'" he alleged. Turning pointedly to the border situation, he said, "I was shocked some time back to see that our Foreign Secretary [Vikram Mirra] was cutting a cake with the Chinese Ambassador. The question is, what exactly is happening in this territory that China has taken?" Referring to the 2020 Galwan Valley incident where 20 Indian soldiers were killed, he said, "There is a celebration tak-

ing place over their martyrdom by cutting a cake." He alleged that the news of written conversations between the Prime Minister and the President with the Chinese has originated from the Chinese ambassador.

BJP response

The BJP strongly rebutted the Congress leader's assertions. Party MP Anurag Thakur stated that "not an inch of land" had been ceded to China under the current government's rule.

"They [the Congress] kept talking about Hindi-Chini bhai bhai and stabbed us in the back," Mr. Thakur said, questioning Mr. Gandhi's own meeting with Chinese officials during the Doklam stand-off. He also raised questions about the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation allegedly receiving funds from Chinese sources.

"Under Modi government, we can say the Indian Army gave a befitting reply during Doklam. The PM went to the border and boosted the morale of the armed forces. The Defence Minister also went... not even a single inch of land anybody has been able to take," he said.

5. Supply Chains & Investment: Tariff uncertainty can disrupt supply chains, especially in sectors like aerospace, which rely on cross-border manufacturing (e.g., Boeing's operations).

Should India reduce tariffs given the U.S.'s moves?



Ajay Shah
Economic columnist affiliated with the XKDR Forum



Laveesh Bhandari
President and senior fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress

PARLEY

United States President Donald Trump's move to impose reciprocal tariffs on many countries, including India, has caused significant uncertainty in the global economy. Indian policymakers have tried to placate Mr. Trump by reducing tariffs on a number of U.S. goods, and they have also been in talks with U.S. trade negotiators about a possible bilateral trade agreement. Should India reduce tariffs given the U.S.'s moves? Ajay Shah and Laveesh Bhandari discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Prashanth Perumal J. Edited excerpts:

What is the consensus opinion among economists on the impact of tariffs on economic growth?

Laveesh Bhandari: I think there is a near-consensus among economists that generally lower tariffs are good and, as much as possible, you should keep tariffs low. It's not just from a consumer perspective, but also from an efficiency perspective. It is important to get our tariffs down, down to wherever we can. And of course, there are many other issues here, the most important being that you also need to look at the non-tariff barriers that exist both within and outside.

Ajay Shah: I agree. I want to add two more points. The first is that the extent of the economic distortions and the damage to efficiency caused by tariffs is related to the heterogeneity of tariffs. So, if you must have tariffs, please have only one or have very few rates. Second, China is a systemically important country. It is a country where the government has a very high control of the economy and there is a whole array of mechanisms through which Chinese overproduction is messing with the world. This calls for certain measures. But generally, in almost all situations, we are better off with lower tariffs with a uniform rate.

Shouldn't governments' tariff policy focus on helping consumers rather than producers?

AS: When there is a 20% customs duty on a car, the price of the car goes up from ₹5 lakh to ₹6 lakh and the consumers end up paying ₹1 lakh extra for a car. Indian manufacturers also get a higher profit margin because they are able to sell the car at ₹6 lakh instead of ₹5 lakh. But this issue is fundamentally about efficiency. That is, if a firm is not competitive and cannot produce a car at ₹5 lakh, it should probably go out of business. You should only be producing in India if you're globally competitive. If not, somebody



*Trump is talking about all countries. He's not talking only about China. GETTY IMAGES

else somewhere in the world should be producing and we should import. So, it's a deeper story about resource allocation: we in India should do the things that we are good at and we should be buying the rest from the world. So, this is the efficiency idea. It is the opposite of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Are Mr. Trump's reciprocal tariffs simply a bargaining tool, or a way of encouraging domestic American manufacturing?

LB: Mr. Trump is not entirely incorrect. Almost every country has different kinds of protection that they provide to their own industry and at the cost of U.S. firms. The problem, however, is when he starts to negotiate different rules to be applied for different countries, such as different rates to be applied to different countries. That's where I think there will be a great harm one way or another to U.S. industry. At the same time, I don't see how else he could have gotten other countries to get their own tariffs down. This had to be perhaps the only tool he had to negotiate others' tariff rates down. I think he is going to mellow down after a year or two when the early gains have kicked in.

Do you think reciprocal tariffs are a good way to get other countries to lower tariffs? The traditional approach has been to negotiate lower tariffs through bodies such as the World Trade Organization.

LB: Yes, but the WTO has effectively become dysfunctional. So, using such a mechanism to get countries to reduce their tariffs and non-tariff barriers would have been a very long shot. So, I think Mr. Trump had to use something more than that. I agree that maybe he's doing this in an extreme manner, but I don't see any other mechanism which could have

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LAVEESH BHANDARI

gotten countries to reduce tariffs.

AS: I think China holds the blame for spoiling the global trade system. China was the systemically large player in world trade, and it practised domestic subsidies and distortions at an unprecedented scale. That has created problems for everybody.

I agree that the WTO is broken and doesn't work as the WTO gives a veto to every single country. So, basically almost any idea can be blocked. India is famous for having been a spoiler by interfering with every imaginable thing. Now, in that context, what do you do? I'm not convinced that the Trump approach is that effective. First of all, he's talking about all countries. He's not talking only about China. He wants to go after so-called unfair trade practices by every country. He is pointing to Indian tariffs, which are essentially the highest in the world. But then what are you going to do about it? The end game is not clear. Mr. Trump is not saying that once India solves everything, that is, if it solves the problem of high tariffs and non-tariff barriers and opens up the economy to free trade, zero tariffs will be imposed on Indian goods coming into America. These are all messy questions and the U.S. is about 20-25% of world GDP. So, action by the U.S. is throwing a spanner in the works of the global economy, and it will harm economic activity and the efficient organisation of production all over the world.

What about non-tariff trade barriers? How significant are they, and what is their effect on global trade and India?

LB: I think non-tariff trade barriers are far more endemic than what even studies are showing. I think they exist in different ways or in almost every sector, and almost every country has some set of non-tariff barriers. India also imposes such barriers on its imports from almost every trade partner. If you talk to people in the industry, they will complain about various kinds of non-tariff trade barriers that they have to face. India may have a different set of benchmark quality specifications required as opposed to those in some other countries. So, sometimes

that also gets in the way, and it's sometimes very difficult to be able to disentangle whether something is an explicit non-tariff trade barrier or not. But having said that, non-tariff trade barriers are a very big issue, and from what I understand of the U.S. approach, they are saying that they will judge and decide for themselves how significant the barriers are.

AS: I agree that non-tariff barriers are very important and very messy. It's very hard to interpret and judge the materiality of a non-tariff barrier. The Europeans have extremely high sanitary standards on the export of grapes from India to Europe. Now it is a level playing field in that the grapes made in France need to comply with the same quality controls as the grapes made in Nashik. It is possible to fiddle with these rules and make them a trade barrier. So, this is a difficult field and also a very important one.

How should India handle Mr. Trump's tariff moves? Should India declare unilateral trade with other countries?

LB: We should reduce tariffs across the board. However, it should not be instantaneous. It's nicer to give some time for firms and stagger tariff reductions and make it clear to the industry that these reductions are permanent and not dependent on how the U.S. responds.

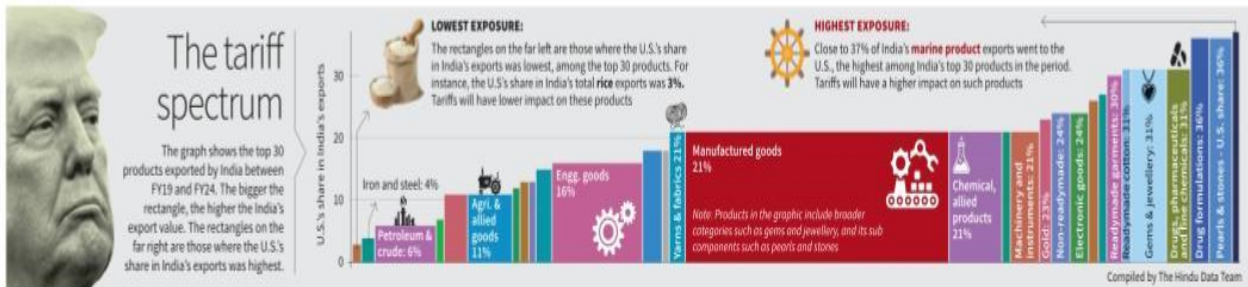
AS: I would like to take us all back to former Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's period, which, in my opinion, witnessed one of the greatest, successful trade liberalisations in India. What was done was years ahead of time. Everybody was told that the peak tariff rate would go down by 5% every year and then businesses started putting this into their planning and it triggered a great investment boom. So, one should not do things suddenly, but you should announce them earlier. And the government needs to achieve credibility, in the sense that whatever announcements are made should actually go through. With a very comprehensive Indo-U.S. free trade agreement, it is possible to remove all the trade barriers between India and the U.S., and that would be exciting. Without any trade barriers, a frozen chicken from Texas would compete with chicken made in Maharashtra. We should also go for complete trade liberalisation with the EU, the U.K., Japan, and so on. That would be something truly transformative for the Indian economy.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link www.thehindu.com

Global Impact:

- **Trade War Risk:** With multiple countries affected, this could trigger a cycle of retaliatory tariffs, leading to a full-blown trade war.
- **Market Volatility:** All major global indices reacted negatively. Trade wars tend to curb investor confidence, delay corporate investments, and hinder global economic growth.
- **WTO Strain:** The U.S. move may be challenged at the World Trade Organization (WTO), further stressing the multilateral trade system.



Potential Retaliation Measures:

1. **Tit-for-Tat Tariffs:** Affected countries may impose **equal or higher tariffs** on U.S. goods (e.g., steel, farm products, machinery).
2. **WTO Complaints:** Countries can lodge disputes at the WTO against the unilateral U.S. measures.
3. **Diversifying Trade Partners:** Nations may seek to strengthen trade ties with non-U.S. partners to reduce dependency and mitigate risks.
4. **Domestic Support Measures:** Like South Korea's move to support its auto industry, countries may announce **subsidies, incentives, or stimulus** for affected sectors.
5. **Blocking U.S. Tech or Services:** In severe cases, retaliatory restrictions could extend to **U.S. companies' operations, digital services, or procurement bids** in foreign markets.

Engineering goods to take a hit, exporters of textiles see ray of hope

Exporters across India have called for the early conclusion of a bilateral free trade agreement with the United States after President Donald Trump slapped 27% reciprocal tariffs

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Exporters across the country have called for the early conclusion of a bilateral free trade agreement (BTA) with the U.S. following President Donald Trump slapping 27% reciprocal tariff on Indian imports.

"Assessing the impact of the recently imposed reciprocal tariffs by the U.S. on Indian exports reveals a nuanced scenario. While the tariffs do present challenges, India's position remains comparatively favorable," said Ajay Sahai, director general and CEO of the Federation of Indian Exporters Organisation.

"For instance, Vietnam faces a 46% tariff, China 34%, and Indonesia 32%, placing India in a relatively better position than key competitors. Despite the tariffs, certain sectors in India, including apparel, gems and jewellery, leather, electronics, chemicals, plastics and furniture, may experience a diversion of exports, potentially offsetting some adverse effects. The timely conclusion of a BTA between India and the U.S. is crucial to mitigate tariffs and provide relief to Indian exporters," he said.



Engineering a decline: In 2024-2025, from April to February, India exported \$17.27 billion engineering goods or 8.3% more than the previous year. This is estimated to drop by \$4 billion in FY26. REUTERS

Exports of marine products, carpets, advanced machinery, and medical equipment are likely to be impacted, he added.

However, engineering exporters are not bullish.

Executive director of EEPIC India Adhip Mitra said the U.S. was the top destination for engineering exports. In 2024-2025 from April to February, India exported \$17.27 billion engineering goods or 8.3% more than previous year.

"Our preliminary estimate is engineering goods exports may drop by \$4

billion to \$5 billion annually in the first year. Going forward, Indian exporters should diversify to new markets to minimise the impact of the U.S. tariff. India should accelerate its efforts for trade agreements with the EU, U.K., Canada and the GCC. Strategic intervention will give relief to exporters," he said.

However, the textile and apparel sector is sanguine despite high vulnerability.

"At present, the tariff announced by the U.S. presents an opportunity for India compared with its

competitors in terms of better market access," said Rakesh Mehra, chairman of the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry.

India exported textile and apparel products worth \$10.5 billion to the U.S. in 2024 or about 28.5% of India's total textile and apparel exports.

The tariff is relatively lower than levies for other competitors. While strategic engagement with the U.S. remains critical, exporters should also focus on expanding into new destinations, he added.

Trump's tariff policy risks damaging long-standing trade relationships, intensifying global economic uncertainty. For India, the priority lies in careful diplomacy, safeguarding its exporters, and recalibrating trade strategy in a rapidly changing global environment.

Prelims Practice Question:

Consider the following statements regarding the recent imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the United States under President Trump:

1. The tariffs were imposed under the authority granted by the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977.
2. India was exempted from the tariff hike due to ongoing bilateral trade negotiations.
3. India's gem and jewellery sector is among the sectors expected to be adversely affected by the new U.S. tariffs.
4. The new tariff regime includes a 10% baseline tariff on all countries, with higher tariffs for countries with large trade surpluses with the U.S.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1, 2, and 3
- B. 1, 3, and 4
- C. 2 and 4 only
- D. 1 and 4 only

Answer: B. 1, 3, and 4

Explanation:

- **Statement 1** is correct: The tariffs were imposed using powers under the IEEPA, 1977.
- **Statement 2** is incorrect: India was not exempted; it was hit with a 27% tariff despite ongoing talks.
- **Statement 3** is correct: The gem and jewellery sector is expected to face difficulties due to high dependency on the U.S. market.
- **Statement 4** is correct: A 10% baseline tariff applies to all, with higher rates for nations with significant trade deficits with the U.S.

Mains Model Question:

Q. “Discuss the implications of the United States’ imposition of reciprocal tariffs on India and the global economy. What options does India have to mitigate the adverse effects of such trade actions?”

The United States' decision under President Trump to impose reciprocal tariffs ranging from 10% to 49% on imports from various trading partners has escalated global trade tensions. India, facing a 27% tariff despite ongoing talks for a Bilateral Trade Agreement, finds itself in a delicate position. These tariffs have been justified by the U.S. under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, citing trade deficits as a national emergency. The move has rattled global markets, causing sharp declines in indices across Asia, Europe, and the U.S., reflecting investor fears of a prolonged trade war.

India's reaction has been notably restrained, with the Commerce Ministry focusing on examining the implications and seeking stakeholder consultations. The 27% tariff, though lower than what some competing Asian economies received, still poses a significant challenge to key Indian export sectors.

The gem and jewellery industry, which heavily relies on the U.S. for over 30% of its exports, is likely to suffer. Other sectors such as aerospace and electronics could face supply chain disruptions.

Globally, the imposition of such unilateral tariffs has revived protectionist sentiments, undermining the spirit of multilateral trade. Countries like China, the EU, and Canada have warned of retaliatory measures, risking further fragmentation of global trade architecture.

China 'firmly opposes' U.S. tariffs, pledges retaliation

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China on Thursday said it "firmly opposes" sweeping new U.S. tariffs on its exports, vowing "counter-measures" to protect its rights and interests.

U.S. President Donald Trump has ignited a potentially ruinous global trade war after imposing 10% levies on imports from around the world and harsh extra duties on key trading partners.

Mr. Trump unveiled particularly stinging tariffs of 34% on China, one of its largest trading partners.

The Commerce Ministry in Beijing said in a statement that those tariffs "do not comply with international trade rules and seriously harm the legitimate rights and interests of the



Trump has imposed 34% tariffs on Chinese imports. AFP

relevant parties". It urged Washington to "immediately cancel" them, warning they "endanger global economic development", hurting U.S. interests and international supply chains.

It also accused the United States of a "typical unilateral bullying practice".

The tariffs come on top of a 20% rate imposed last month.

At a weekly briefing on

Thursday, the Commerce Ministry slammed Washington's "protectionism and bullying". But it also said that the two sides were "maintaining communication" over sources of contention in trade and economic issues.

Beijing's Foreign Ministry also warned the United States that protectionism has no "exit ramp" and noted the broad international opposition to the measures. China previously responded to U.S. tariffs with levies of up to 15% on a range of U.S. agricultural goods including soybeans, pork and chicken.

U.S. duties have threatened to harm China's fragile economic recovery as it struggles with a long-running debt crisis in the property sector and persistently low consumption.

EU 'prepared to respond' to tariffs, but open for talks

There seems to be no order in the disorder, no clear path through the complexity and chaos that is being created as all U.S. trading partners are hit, says European Commission's von der Leyen

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Hours after U.S. President Donald Trump announced tariffs on America's trade partners, including 20% on EU goods, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the bloc was "prepared to respond", even as she appeared to keep the door open for negotiations.

"I deeply regret this choice," she said, referring to Mr. Trump's tariffs, as she delivered a video broadcast on Thursday morning. The U.S. President had announced a baseline tariff of 10% on all goods coming into the U.S., with some countries and entities facing higher tariffs, roughly at half the average tariff rate charged by them for U.S. goods, as per Mr. Trump. The U.S. would charge China 34%, India 27% and Vietnam 46%. Non-EU European coun-



Conflict resolution: Ursula von der Leyen said the EU was watching for indirect impacts on Trump's announcement. AFP

tries were taxed at different rates: the U.K. at 10% and Switzerland at 3%.

Tariffs would hurt people across the world, Ms. von der Leyen said, adding that there was no clear path through the uncertainty.

"And what is more, there seems to be no order in the disorder. No clear path through the complexity and chaos that is being created as all U.S. trading partners are hit," she said.

The EU had already an-

nounced last month that it was preparing to respond to Mr. Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminium. Ms. von der Leyen confirmed that process was under way.

"And we are now preparing for further counter-measures, to protect our interests and our businesses if negotiations fail," Ms. von der Leyen added. The bloc's executive head also said the EU was watching for indirect impacts on Mr. Trump's announcement,

i.e., in terms of the dumping of cheap goods by third countries, whose exports were originally intended for the U.S.

Ms. von der Leyen appeared to offer an off-ramp though saying there are "others" taking advantage of the trading system and that she was ready to assist in making the international trading system "fit for the realities" of a global economy.

"But I also want to be clear: Reaching for tariffs as your first and last tool will not fix it," she added.

Earlier this week, Ms. von der Leyen said the EU would be looking at removing bureaucratic and regulatory challenges to trade within its borders as part of the strategy to counter Mr. Trump's moves. On Thursday, she told Europeans who were feeling let down by their "oldest ally" that with a strength of 450 million, the European Single Market was their "safe harbour" in difficult times.

India's options include continuing diplomatic efforts to finalize the Bilateral Trade Agreement with the U.S. to secure long-term trade stability. It may also explore diversifying export destinations and leveraging multilateral forums like the WTO to challenge arbitrary trade barriers. Additionally, strengthening domestic competitiveness and investing in trade infrastructure can cushion the economy against external shocks. While India's subdued response reflects diplomatic prudence, a calibrated mix of engagement and readiness for reciprocity will be essential in defending its economic interests in an increasingly uncertain global trade environment.

Topic : Seaweed : A Nutritional Powerhouse

Relevance : GS Paper 3 Environmental Science

Source : PIB

Context :

Seaweed is a type of marine algae found in oceans and seas, especially in **shallow coastal waters**. It comes in various forms and colors—green, brown, and red—and is **not only edible but extremely nutritious**. Unlike traditional crops, it doesn't require land, fresh water, fertilizers, or pesticides, making it a **sustainable and environment-friendly resource**.

Nutritional Powerhouse

Seaweed is packed with:

- **Vitamins** (like A, C, E, K, and B complex)
- **Minerals** (iron, calcium, iodine, magnesium, zinc)
- **Amino acids** and **antioxidants**
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** (in some species)

Health Benefits:

- Helps fight **cancer, diabetes, arthritis, heart problems, and high blood pressure**
- Enhances **immunity** and overall **well-being**
- Can help tackle **nutritional deficiencies**, which is vital in a country like India

Global Significance of Seaweed

Long History of Use:

- Used as food in **Japan (since the 4th century)** and **China (since the 6th century)**
- Major consumers: **Japan, China, and South Korea**

Economic Boom:

- **Global Seaweed Industry Value: USD 5.6 billion**
- Projected to grow to **USD 11.8 billion by 2030** (World Bank estimate)
- Seaweed is used in:
 - **Food** (sushi, soups, snacks)
 - **Cosmetics** (face masks, creams)
 - **Fertilizers and Biostimulants**
 - **Medicine and Pharmaceuticals**
 - **Industrial agents** like **Alginate, Agar, and Carrageenan**

Seaweed is a nutrient-rich marine plant, packed with vitamins, minerals and amino acids.

It contains **54 trace elements and essential nutrients** that help fight diseases like cancer, diabetes, arthritis, heart problems and high blood pressure.

Seaweed is a sea plant that grows in the ocean and seas.

Seaweed cultivation requires no land, freshwater, fertilizers or pesticides, making it sustainable.

The **\$5.6 billion seaweed industry** is booming, with India's production increasing steadily.

Under one of its components, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) aims to boost seaweed production to **1.12 million tonnes** in five years.



Major Extracts and Their Uses:

- **Alginate:** From brown seaweed; used in food thickening, cosmetics, and medicine
- **Agar:** From red seaweed; used in desserts, jellies, and laboratory petri dishes

- **Carrageenan:** From red seaweed; used in dairy, ice cream, toothpaste

Geographical Advantage:

- With **7,500 km of coastline**, India is well-positioned to become a seaweed hub.
- **60 out of 844 seaweed species** in India have commercial value.

Government Initiatives:

- **PMMSY (Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana):** Launched in 2020 with ₹20,050 crore investment to boost the fisheries sector.
 - ₹640 crore allocated specifically for seaweed farming (2020–25)
 - 194.09 crore used for key infrastructure:
 - **Seaweed Park** in Tamil Nadu
 - **Seaweed Brood Bank** in Daman and Diu
 - **Targets:** Increase production to **1.12 million tonnes** in 5 years
 - Approved:
 - **46,095 rafts**
 - **65,330 monoclone tubenets**



Benefits of Seaweed Farming

1. Environmental:

- Seaweed absorbs **carbon dioxide**, helping **mitigate climate change**
- Improves **water quality** and provides habitat for marine life
- Promotes **biodiversity** and ecological balance

Carrageenan (US\$ 240 million): Extracted from certain red seaweeds like Irish Moss. It's used in dairy products, ice creams, and toothpaste.

Seaweed has been used as food since the 4th century in Japan and the 6th century in China. Today, Japan, China and South Korea are the biggest consumers of seaweed. The global seaweed industry—including food, industrial products and extracts—is valued at around **US\$ 5.6 billion**. According to a World Bank report, 10 emerging seaweed markets could grow by up to **US\$ 11.8 billion by 2030**.

2. Agricultural:

- Acts as a **biostimulant**—improving plant growth, yield, and stress tolerance
- Encouraged under **organic farming** programs like:
 - **Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)**
 - **MOVCD-NER** (for Northeast India)

A **biostimulant** is a natural substance or microorganism that helps plants grow stronger. It improves the plant's ability to absorb nutrients and makes them more resistant to stress, like drought or diseases. Unlike fertilizers or pesticides, biostimulants don't provide nutrients directly but enhance the plant's natural processes for better growth and health.

3. Economic & Social:

- Additional income source for **coastal fishers**
- Farming ***Kappaphycus alvarezii*** (used for carrageenan) can yield up to **₹13.28 lakh per hectare annually**
- Promotes **women empowerment** and **livelihood generation**

Empowering Women Through Seaweed Farming

Jeya Lakshmi, Jeya, Thangam, and Kaleeswari from Mandapam, Tamil Nadu, were homemakers from poor families struggling to make ends meet. After attending a seaweed farming training under the PMMSY scheme, they decided to start their own business. With an investment of ₹27,000 and financial support from Tamil Nadu State Apex Fisheries Co-operative Federation Limited (TAFCOFED), they began seaweed cultivation. Despite challenges like cyclones, nutrient issues, and marketing hurdles, they managed to produce 36,000 tonnes of wet seaweed. This not only made them financially independent but also created jobs for other women in their community, inspiring many to pursue seaweed farming.

Success Stories**Empowering Women:**

- Women from Mandapam, Tamil Nadu (e.g., Jeya Lakshmi, Thangam) took up seaweed farming under PMMSY.
- Investment: ₹27,000 with government support
- Outcome: Produced **36,000 tonnes of wet seaweed**, became financially independent, and created jobs.

Tissue Culture Advancement:**Boosting Seaweed Production with Tissue Culture**

- **CSIR-CSMCRI** introduced **tissue culture** to mass-produce ***Kappaphycus alvarezii***
- Farmers in **Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, and Tuticorin** benefited
- Result: Higher quality seaweed with 20-30% faster growth in just two cycles.

The CSIR-Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSIR-CSMCRI) introduced a tissue culture technique to mass-produce *Kappaphycus alvarezii* (elkhorn sea moss) in Tamil Nadu. This seaweed is valuable for producing carrageenan, used in food, pharma, and cosmetics. Through this project, tissue-cultured seedlings were distributed to farmers in Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, and Tuticorin districts. Farmers produced 30 tonnes of seaweed in just two cycles, with a 20-30% higher growth rate and better-quality carrageenan. This breakthrough is set to boost commercial seaweed farming in India.

Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to seaweed cultivation in India, consider the following statements:

1. Seaweed farming requires large tracts of arable land and freshwater for cultivation.
2. Seaweed farming can help mitigate climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide.
3. Under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), the Government of India aims to establish Seaweed Parks and Brood Banks.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B. 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 is incorrect:** Seaweed **does not require land or freshwater**. It grows in shallow seawater and is a sustainable marine crop.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Seaweed **absorbs CO₂**, thus playing a role in **climate change mitigation**.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Under **PMMSY**, the government has planned projects like the **Seaweed Park in Tamil Nadu** and **Seaweed Brood Bank in Daman and Diu**.

Mains Model Question:

Q. Seaweed cultivation offers a sustainable alternative for economic growth and ecological balance in India's coastal regions. Discuss the potential and challenges of seaweed farming in the Indian context.

Seaweed cultivation is increasingly gaining attention as a viable and sustainable livelihood option, particularly in India's coastal regions. With a 7,500 km-long coastline, India has vast potential to harness the benefits of seaweed farming. Seaweed, a nutrient-rich marine plant, is used in food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and as bio-fertilizers. It does not require land, freshwater, or chemical inputs, making it an eco-friendly alternative in agriculture and aquaculture sectors.

Nutritionally, seaweed is a powerhouse containing vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and antioxidants that help combat health issues such as diabetes, heart diseases, and cancer. Its cultivation also holds promise in addressing nutritional deficiencies, especially among vulnerable populations. Economically, the global seaweed industry is booming, valued at \$5.6 billion and projected to reach \$11.8 billion by 2030. India's focus on expanding this sector is reflected in the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), which allocated ₹640 crore for seaweed development, including the establishment of a Seaweed Park in Tamil Nadu and a Seaweed Brood Bank in Daman and Diu.

Ecologically, seaweed absorbs carbon dioxide, thus mitigating climate change and improving marine biodiversity by enhancing water quality. It also serves as a biostimulant, boosting soil health and crop resilience, aligning with organic farming goals under schemes like PKVY.

However, challenges persist. Climate risks such as cyclones, lack of awareness among coastal communities, inadequate processing infrastructure, and limited market access hinder large-scale adoption. Despite these hurdles, success stories from Tamil Nadu show how women-led initiatives in seaweed farming have transformed livelihoods.

With the right policy support, technological intervention, and community participation, seaweed farming can become a cornerstone of India's blue economy, offering both economic resilience and ecological sustainability for coastal communities.

Topic : Stand-Up India**Relevance :** GS paper 2 Polity and Governance**Source :** PIB**Context :**

Launched on **5th April 2016** as part of the Government of India's broader financial inclusion agenda, the **Stand-Up India Scheme** seeks to transform the entrepreneurial landscape of the country. Rooted in the ethos of "**Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas**", the scheme specifically targets **Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women entrepreneurs**—groups that have historically been marginalized in access to formal credit and enterprise development.

Through targeted credit support and handholding services, the scheme aims to democratize access to economic opportunities and promote an **inclusive growth model** by fostering grassroots entrepreneurship.

Objectives of the Stand-Up India Scheme

The primary aim of Stand-Up India is to promote **economic empowerment** and **financial inclusion** by facilitating access to institutional credit. The core objectives include:

- Enabling SC/ST and women entrepreneurs to set up **greenfield enterprises** (first-time ventures).
- Promoting enterprise development in **non-farm sectors**, including **manufacturing, services, agri-allied activities, and trading**.
- Bridging the credit gap by ensuring bank loans in the range of **Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 1 crore**.
- Facilitating entrepreneurial handholding through **mentorship, training, and financial literacy** support.

This scheme complements other government initiatives like **Start-Up India, MUDRA Yojana, and Digital India**, contributing to a holistic ecosystem of entrepreneurship.



Target Group and Loan Structure

Under this scheme, each bank branch is mandated to provide loans to at least **one SC/ST borrower** and **one woman borrower**. These loans are offered for greenfield projects, i.e., those which are being launched for the first time by the applicant.

The loan structure is **composite** in nature—comprising both **term loan** and **working capital** components—with funding of up to **75% of the project cost**, subject to the condition that the borrower contributes the remaining 25% via own capital or through convergence with other schemes.

Support Ecosystem

A distinctive feature of Stand-Up India is the **handholding support** provided through the **Stand-Up Mitra portal**, which connects borrowers to a network of facilitators, banks, training institutes, and support services. Services include:

- **Preparation of business plans**
- **Credit counseling**
- **Entrepreneurship development training**
- **Market access and skill development**

This ecosystem addresses both financial and non-financial barriers to entrepreneurship.

Achievements and Performance Over 7 Years (2016–2025)

The growth of the Stand-Up India scheme has been impressive, reflecting not only policy effectiveness but also increasing awareness and confidence among beneficiaries.

Cumulative Loan Sanctions

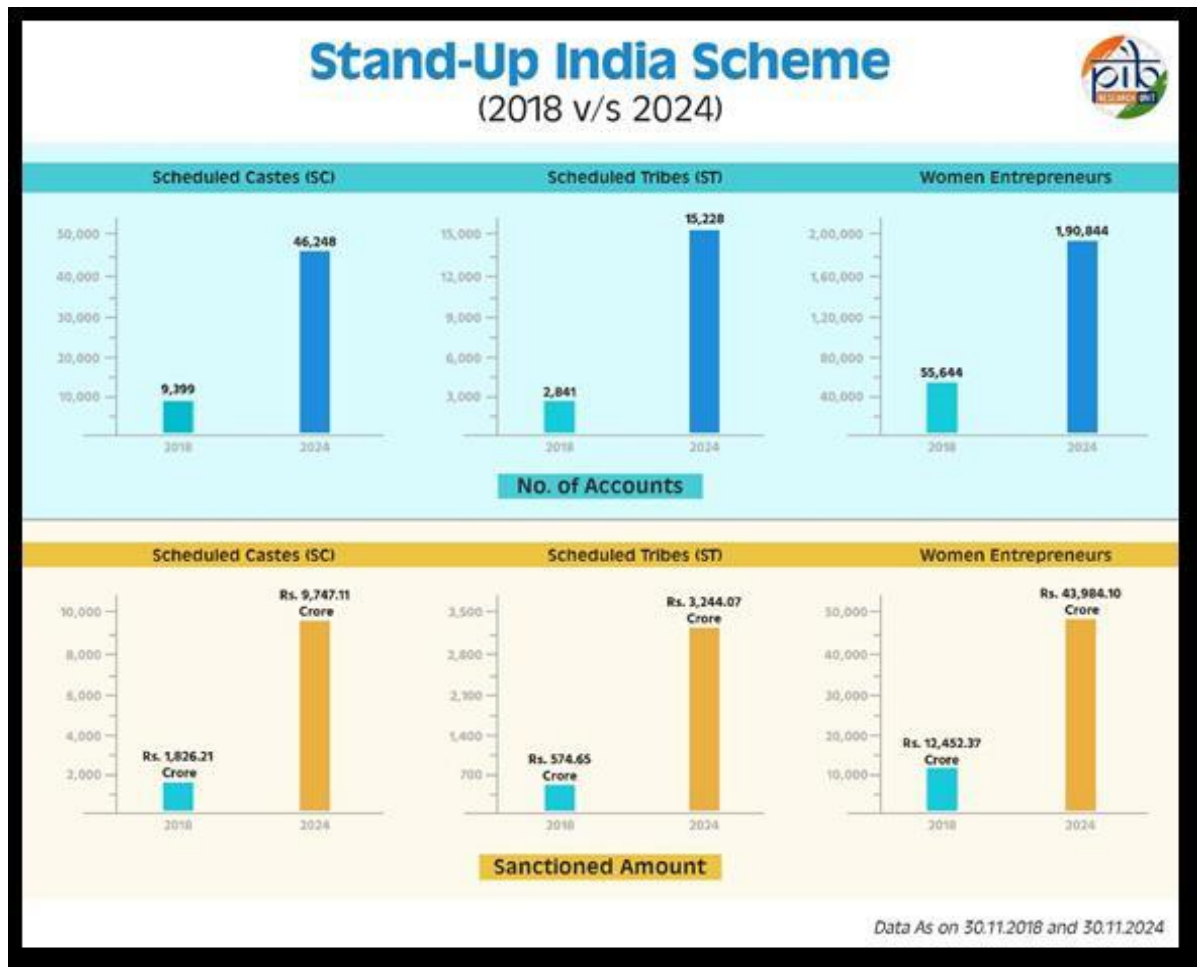
- As of **31st March 2019**, total loan sanctions stood at **Rs. 16,085.07 crore**.
- By **17th March 2025**, the amount rose to **Rs. 61,020.41 crore**, a **nearly fourfold increase**, indicating the expanding reach and trust in the scheme.

Achievements Under Stand-Up India

The Stand-Up India Scheme has shown remarkable growth over the years, with the total amount sanctioned rising from **Rs. 16,085.07 crore as of 31st March 2019** to an impressive **Rs. 61,020.41 crore by 17th March 2025**, since its launch. This reflects a substantial increase, highlighting the scheme's expanding impact in empowering entrepreneurs across the country.

The scheme reflected significant financial empowerment for the SC, ST communities and women entrepreneurs (from March 2018 to March 2024):

- SC accounts grew from **9,399 to 46,248** with loan amounts rising from **Rs. 1,826.21 crore to Rs. 9,747.11 crore**.
- ST accounts increased from **2,841 to 15,228** with sanctioned loans jumping from **Rs. 574.65 crore to Rs. 3,244.07 crore**.
- From 2018 to 2024, women entrepreneurs saw growth from **55,644 to 1,90,844 accounts**, with sanctioned amounts rising from **Rs. 12,452.37 crore to Rs. 43,984.10 crore**.



Category-Wise Progress (March 2018 – March 2024)

Scheduled Caste (SC) Entrepreneurs:

- Loan accounts grew from **9,399** to **46,248**.
- Corresponding loan amounts increased from **Rs. 1,826.21 crore** to **Rs. 9,747.11 crore**.

Scheduled Tribe (ST) Entrepreneurs:

- Accounts rose from **2,841** to **15,228**.
- Loans sanctioned jumped from **Rs. 574.65 crore** to **Rs. 3,244.07 crore**.

Women Entrepreneurs:

- Saw the **largest participation**, with accounts growing from **55,644** to **1,90,844**.
- Loan amounts increased from **Rs. 12,452.37 crore** to **Rs. 43,984.10 crore**.

This progress demonstrates not only the financial inclusion of disadvantaged sections but also their rising participation in India's entrepreneurial journey.

Socio-Economic Impact

By specifically targeting SCs, STs, and women, the scheme serves as a catalyst for **social justice** and **economic parity**. It gives underrepresented groups a chance to become job creators rather than job seekers, thus uplifting entire communities.

Most beneficiaries of Stand-Up India are from rural and semi-urban regions, which traditionally lack access to capital. The scheme thus contributes to **balanced regional development** and reduction of **urban migration**.

Each supported enterprise not only supports the entrepreneur but also generates employment for others, thus acting as a **multiplier** in job creation and local economic activity.

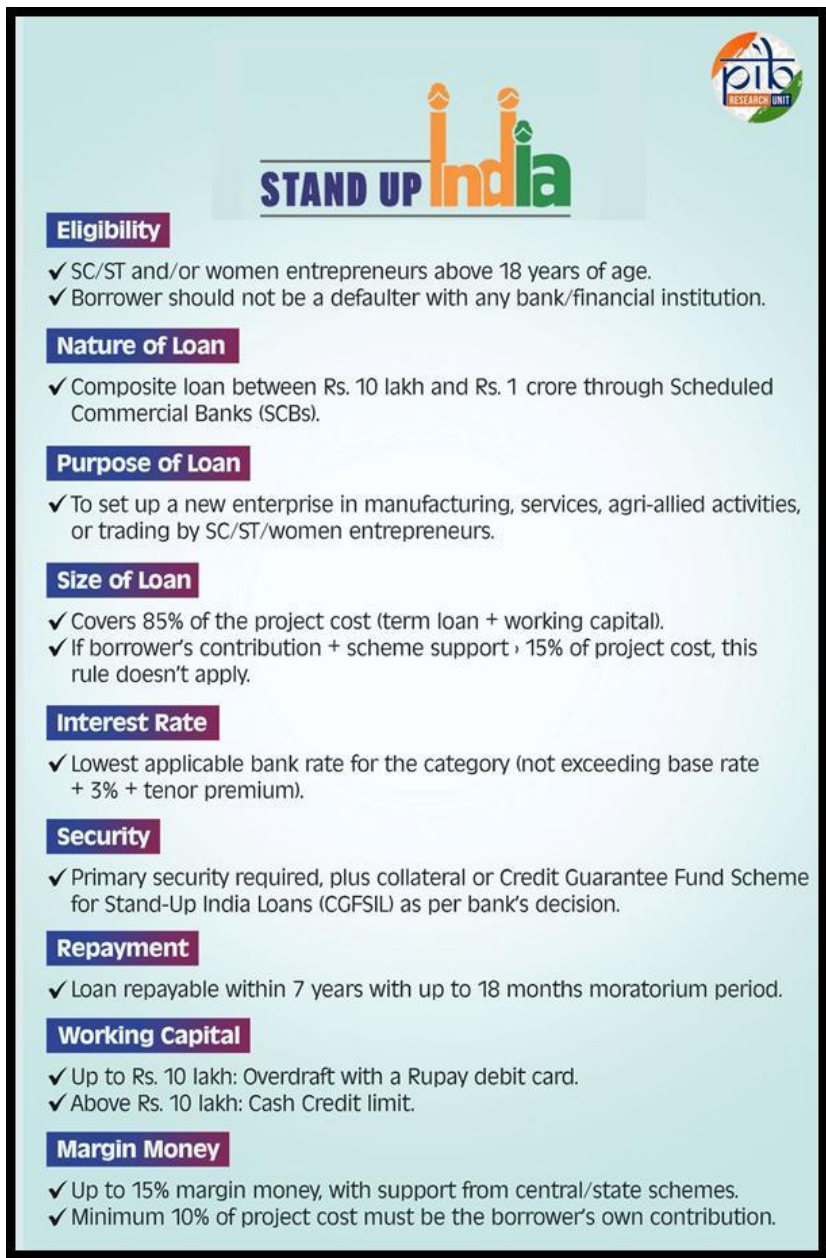
Challenges in Implementation

Despite its success, the scheme faces some challenges:

- **Low Awareness:** In several remote and backward areas, awareness about the scheme remains limited.
- **Documentation Barriers:** Many potential entrepreneurs lack the knowledge or resources to prepare business plans or meet procedural requirements.
- **Access to Market and Mentors:** While loans may be sanctioned, beneficiaries often struggle with **sustainability** due to lack of market access, skills, or professional mentorship.
- **Repayment and NPA Risks:** Ensuring that businesses succeed and loans are repaid remains a continuous challenge.

Turning Aspirations into Achievements

The **Stand-Up India Scheme** stands out as a **transformational policy** that brings the most marginalized into the economic mainstream. It is not merely a credit program—it is an instrument of **nation-building**, **gender empowerment**, and **inclusive capitalism**. By nurturing first-time entrepreneurs with institutional credit,



The infographic features the 'STAND UP India' logo at the top center, with a PIB Research Unit logo in the top right corner. Below the logo, the details are organized into sections with blue headers and green checkmarks:

- Eligibility**
 - ✓ SC/ST and/or women entrepreneurs above 18 years of age.
 - ✓ Borrower should not be a defaulter with any bank/financial institution.
- Nature of Loan**
 - ✓ Composite loan between Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore through Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs).
- Purpose of Loan**
 - ✓ To set up a new enterprise in manufacturing, services, agri-allied activities, or trading by SC/ST/women entrepreneurs.
- Size of Loan**
 - ✓ Covers 85% of the project cost (term loan + working capital).
 - ✓ If borrower's contribution + scheme support > 15% of project cost, this rule doesn't apply.
- Interest Rate**
 - ✓ Lowest applicable bank rate for the category (not exceeding base rate + 3% + tenor premium).
- Security**
 - ✓ Primary security required, plus collateral or Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Stand-Up India Loans (CGFSIL) as per bank's decision.
- Repayment**
 - ✓ Loan repayable within 7 years with up to 18 months moratorium period.
- Working Capital**
 - ✓ Up to Rs. 10 lakh: Overdraft with a Rupay debit card.
 - ✓ Above Rs. 10 lakh: Cash Credit limit.
- Margin Money**
 - ✓ Up to 15% margin money, with support from central/state schemes.
 - ✓ Minimum 10% of project cost must be the borrower's own contribution.

mentoring, and structural support, it creates an environment where **aspirations are converted into achievements**.

Going forward, enhanced awareness, grassroots outreach, and robust post-loan support will be critical to maximize the long-term impact of the scheme and fulfill the vision of **Atmanirbhar Bharat**.



Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to the **Stand-Up India Scheme**, consider the following statements:

1. It aims to facilitate bank loans only to women entrepreneurs above the age of 35.
2. It provides loans for greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services, or trading sectors.
3. Each bank branch is required to provide loans to at least one SC/ST and one woman borrower.
4. The loan amount ranges between ₹10 lakh to ₹5 crore.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3, and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, and 3 only

Correct Answer: A. 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1 – Incorrect:** The scheme is not restricted to women above 35 years; it is open to all **women entrepreneurs** and **SC/ST individuals** aged 18 years and above.
- **Statement 2 – Correct:** The scheme provides loans for **greenfield enterprises** in the **manufacturing, services, trading, and agri-allied sectors**.
- **Statement 3 – Correct:** Every bank branch is required to provide loans to at least **one SC/ST** and **one woman** borrower.
- **Statement 4 – Incorrect:** The **loan amount ranges from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore**, not ₹5 crore.

Mains Model Question:

Q. “Stand-Up India is more than a credit scheme; it is a tool of socio-economic transformation.” Examine the statement in the context of its performance and impact since inception.

The Stand-Up India Scheme, launched in 2016, represents a focused attempt by the Government of India to promote entrepreneurship among historically marginalized communities—Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women. While at its core the scheme provides bank loans ranging from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore for greenfield enterprises, its deeper objective lies in enabling social equity, economic empowerment, and inclusive development.



The significance of Stand-Up India lies in the structural barriers it addresses. Traditionally, access to institutional finance has been skewed in favor of the socio-economically privileged. This scheme intervenes by mandating every bank branch to support at least one SC/ST and one woman entrepreneur, thereby ensuring targeted outreach. It also provides crucial handholding support like mentorship, skill development, and market linkage through the Stand-Up Mitra portal, making it more than a mere credit initiative.

Since its inception, the scheme has witnessed exponential growth. By March 2025, over ₹61,000 crore had been sanctioned to more than 2.5 lakh beneficiaries, with women forming the majority. This not only signifies the rising entrepreneurial spirit among underrepresented groups but also indicates the systemic shift toward grassroots enterprise development. Such enterprises have spurred local employment, reduced migration pressures, and contributed to regional economic stability.

However, challenges persist in the form of low awareness, procedural hurdles, and the need for post-sanction support. Despite these, the Stand-Up India Scheme stands as a transformative policy tool. It reflects a vision where financial inclusion becomes a means to socio-economic justice. By fostering first-generation entrepreneurs, especially from disadvantaged groups, the scheme upholds the ideals of participatory growth and represents a meaningful stride toward the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.