

GOVERNANCE
ASER Survey 2020

Recently, the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) survey has been released which provides a glimpse into the levels of learning loss that students in rural India are suffering, with varying levels of access to technology, school and family resources resulting in a digital divide in education.

This year, in the wake of the pandemic, the survey was conducted via phone calls, reaching 52,227 rural households with school-age children in 30 States and Union Territories (UTs).

Annual Status of Education Report

- It is a nationwide survey of rural education and learning outcomes in terms of reading and arithmetic skills that has been conducted by the NGO Pratham for the last 15 years.
- It uses Census 2011 as the sampling frame and continues to be an important national source of information about children's foundational skills across the country.
- ASER 2018 surveyed children in the age group of 3 to 16 years and included almost all rural districts in India and generated estimates of foundational reading and arithmetic abilities of children in the age group 5 to 16 years.
- ASER 2019 reported on the pre-schooling or schooling status of children in the age group 4 to 8 years in 26 rural districts, focused on the "early years" and laid emphasis on "developing problem-solving faculties and building a memory of children, and not content knowledge".
- ASER 2020 is the first ever phone-based ASER survey and it was conducted in September 2020, the sixth month of national school closures.

Key Points
Enrollments:

- 5.5% of rural children are not currently enrolled for the 2020 school year, up from 4% in 2018.
- This difference is the sharpest among the youngest children (6 to 10) where 5.3% of rural children had not yet enrolled in school in 2020, in comparison to just 1.8% in 2018.
- Due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic, families are waiting for the physical opening of schools to enrol their youngest children, with about 10% of six-year-olds not in school.
- Among 15-16 year-olds, however, enrollment levels are slightly higher than in 2018.
- The proportion of boys enrolled in government schools has risen from 62.8% in 2018 to 66.4% in 2020, while for girls, that number has gone up from 70% to 73% in the corresponding period.
- Patterns show a slight shift toward government schools, with private schools seeing a drop in enrolment in all age groups.
- The Centre has now permitted States to start reopening schools if they can follow Covid-19 safety protocols but the majority of the country's 25 crore students are still at home.

Availability of Smartphones:

- Among enrolled children, 61.8% live in families that own at least one smartphone which was merely 36.5% in 2018.
- About 11% of families bought a new phone after the lockdown, of which 80% were smartphones.
- WhatsApp is by far the most popular mode of transmitting learning materials to students, with 75% of students receiving input via this app.

Availability of Learning Material:

- Overall more than 80% of children said they had textbooks for their current grade.
- This proportion was higher among students enrolled in government schools (84.1%) than in private ones (72.2%).
- In Bihar, less than 8% got such materials from their schools, along with 20% in West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- More than 80% of rural children in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala and Gujarat received such input.

Learning Activities:

- Most children (70.2%) did some form of a learning activity through material shared by tutors or family members themselves, with or without regular input.
- 11% had access to live online classes, and 21% had videos or recorded classes, with much higher levels in private schools.
- About 60% studied from their textbooks and 20% watched classes broadcast on TV.

Suggestions

- Fluid Situation: When schools reopen, it will be important to continue to monitor who goes back to school as well as to understand whether there is learning loss as compared to previous years.
- Building on and Strengthening Family Support: Parents' increasing levels of education can be integrated into planning for learning improvement, as advocated by National Education Policy, 2020. Reaching parents at the right level is essential to understand how they can help their children and older siblings also play an important role.
- Hybrid Learning: As children do a variety of different activities at home, effective ways of hybrid learning need to be developed which combine traditional teaching-learning with newer ways of "reaching-learning".
- Assessment of Digital Modes and Content: In order to improve digital content and delivery for the future, an in-depth assessment of what works, how well it works, who it reaches, and who it excludes is needed.
- Mediating the Digital Divide: Children from families who had low education and also did not have resources like smartphones had less access to learning opportunities. However, even among such households, there is evidence of effort with family members trying to help and schools trying to reach them. These children will need even more help than others when schools reopen.

Way Forward

Covid-19 has left the nation with deep economic distress and uncertainty over school-reopenings and thrown open new challenges in every sector.

The nationally representative sample highlighted the role played by the families where everyone in the family supported children regardless of their education levels.

This strength needs to be leveraged by reaching out to more students and reducing the distance between schools and homes.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Rising GST Revenues

According to the recent data released by the Finance Ministry, the gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue collected in October 2020 was Rs. 1.05 lakh crore.

It is 10.25% higher than in 2019 and 10.1% more than the revenue garnered in September 2020.

Key Points

- The total revenue earned in October by the Central and State governments stood at Rs. 44,285 crore and Rs. 44,839 crore, respectively.
- GST cess collections, used to compensate the States for switching to the GST regime, rose to Rs. 8,011 crore, which is over 5% more than in 2019 and 12.5% higher than September 2020.
- October's revenues from import of goods were 9% higher, while domestic transactions (including import of services) yielded 11% higher revenues, on a year-on-year basis.

Status of the States:

- Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh recorded the highest 26% growth in GST collections in October year-on-year, followed by Jharkhand (23%) and Rajasthan (22%).
- The trend in the more industrially developed States was mixed, with 15% growth in Gujarat, 13% in Tamil Nadu and just 5% in Maharashtra.

Reasons:

- The surge in October's GST inflows could be attributed to the festive demand and input tax credits as well as other reconciliations that were due for businesses in September.
- Many companies raised sale invoices in September by pushing out their finished products which they had planned in March itself.
- Input Tax Credit: The GST that a merchant pays to procure goods or services (i.e. on inputs) can be set off later against the tax applicable on supply of final goods and services. The set-off tax is called an input tax credit.
- India's manufacturing sector activities started to show signs of growth in August and September, driven mainly by a pick-up in production along with improvement in customer demand.

Implications:

- GST inflows crossing the Rs. 1 lakh crore mark for the first time in the financial year (FY) 2020-21 is a clear sign of a recovery in the economy after its 23.9% contraction in the first quarter of 2020.
- The expected shortfall in GST compensation for the States could be lower than the current estimate of Rs. 2.35 lakh crore if this revenue momentum is maintained through the rest of 2020-21.

- According to the Consortium of Indian Associations, October's GST inflows must not be considered a return to normalcy for businesses as these revenues normally relate to sales that occurred in September, when a majority of the economy, including public transport, was unlocked.
- The consortium of Indian Associations is an umbrella body of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME).
- November and December data has to be awaited before confidently saying that the economy has rebounded to pre-Covid-19 times.

Goods and Services Tax

- It is a comprehensive, multi-stage, destination-based indirect tax that is levied on every value addition.
- The Goods and Service Tax Act was passed in the Parliament on 29th March 2017 and came into effect on 1st July 2017.
- Under the GST Council and 101st constitutional amendment 2017, the tax is levied at every point of sale.
- GST is categorised into Central GST (CGST), State GST (SGST) and Integrated GST (IGST) depending on whether the transaction is intra-State or inter-State.
- Central GST: CGST is a tax levied on intra-State supplies of both goods and services by the Central Government and is governed by the CGST Act.
- State GST: SGST is also levied on the same intra-State supply but will be governed by the State Governments.
- This implies that both the Central and the State governments agree on combining their levies with an appropriate proportion for revenue sharing between them.
- However, it is clearly mentioned in Section 8 of the GST Act that the taxes be levied on all intra-State supplies of goods and/or services but the rate of tax shall not be exceeding 14%, each.
- Integrated GST: IGST is a tax levied on all inter-State supplies of goods and/or services and is governed by the IGST Act.
- It is applicable to any supply of goods and/or services in both cases of import into and export from India.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India in Support of France

Recently, India came out in support of France's President who has been criticised by Pakistan and Turkey for strongly defending the French people's right to freedom of expression.

Key Points

Background:

- Recently, a French schoolteacher was murdered for showing caricatures of the Prophet to his students.
- Condemning the murder, French President defended the freedom of expression and secular values.
- In response, Turkey and Pakistan accused French President of running an anti-Islamic agenda and provoking Muslims.
- Iran and Saudi Arabia too condemned the cartoon. There was a call in the entire muslim world to boycott French products.

India's Support to France:

- India condemned the criticism of Turkey and Pakistan on French President, by calling the criticism in violation of the most basic standards of international discourse.
- India also condemned the murder of schoolteacher as brutal terrorist attack.
- While France has seen repeated violent incidents around caricatures and cartoons that are deemed offensive, it is unusual for India to wade into a controversy over religion in another country.
- In 2015, after the attack on Charlie Hebdo journalists and cartoonists, India condemned the incident by calling that India was on the side of those who condemn this barbaric incident.
- India's support for French President could have been influenced by the fact that the charge against the French President has been led by Turkey and Pakistan, two countries that have repeatedly attacked India over Jammu and Kashmir and alleged human rights violations.

India-France Ties:

- **Strategic:** India has close strategic ties with France, especially on issues of mutual interest from counter-terrorism to defence, and nuclear to space.

- **Terror:** France backed the India's proposal for a global conference on terrorism. Both the countries also support organising a new "No Money for Terror" - an International Conference on Fighting Terrorist Financing.
- Two countries agreed to enhance their operational cooperation and launch fresh efforts to fight radicalisation, especially Online Radicalisation.
- **Defence:** Both countries have a defence dialogue at the Ministerial level.
- The three services have regular defence exercises; viz.
 1. Exercise Shakti (Army)
 2. Exercise Varuna (Navy)
 3. Exercise Garuda (Air Force)
- Recently, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has received its first batch (5 out of 36) of French Rafale aviation combat aircraft at Ambala Air base (Haryana).
- **Space:** Both have decided to deepen space cooperation to meet new challenges together, whether it concerns planetary exploration or human spaceflight.
- France has agreed to be part of India's Venus mission, scheduled for 2025.
- ISRO's Venus instrument, VIRAL (Venus Infrared Atmospheric Gases Linker) has been co-developed by Russian and French agencies.
- **Multilateral Platform:** France has been extremely supportive of India at the UN Security Council on Kashmir and Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, among other issues.
- The Prime Minister of India was a special invitee at the 45th G-7 Summit in Biarritz, France where India was one of the "Goodwill" partners.
- **Climate:** The two countries have a close cooperation on climate change, and have formed the International Solar Alliance.

Way Forward

India's relations with France is built on a foundation of shared democratic values and are informed by a commonality of interest in issues such as sustainable development and climate change.

France also opens the pathway for deeper engagement with Europe on global issues, especially after uncertainty in the region due to Brexit.

The new partnerships with France, Germany and other like-minded countries like Japan would hopefully turn out to be far more consequential for India's influence on the global stage.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Earth Observation Satellite EOS-01: ISRO

India would launch its latest earth observation satellite EOS-01 and nine international customer satellites from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota.

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C49) of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch these ten satellites on 7th November 2020. It will be PSLV's 51st Mission.

Key Points

- EOS-01: It is an earth observation satellite and is intended for applications in agriculture, forestry and disaster management support.
- Earth observation satellites are the satellites equipped with remote sensing technology. Earth observation is the gathering of information about Earth's physical, chemical and biological systems.
- Many earth observation satellites have been employed on sun-synchronous orbit.
- Other earth observation satellites launched by ISRO include RESOURCESAT- 2, 2A, CARTOSAT-1, 2, 2A, 2B, RISAT-1 and 2, OCEANSAT-2, Megha-Tropiques, SARAL and SCATSAT-1, INSAT-3DR, 3D, etc.
- Nine Customer Satellites: These are being launched as part of a commercial agreement with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), Department of Space.
- NSIL, incorporated in 2019 (under the Companies Act, 2013), is a wholly owned Government of India company, under the administrative control of Department of Space (DOS).
- NSIL is the commercial arm of ISRO with the primary responsibility of enabling Indian industries to take up high technology space related activities and is also responsible for promotion and commercial exploitation of the products and services emanating from the Indian space programme.

The major business areas of the NSIL include:

- Production of Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) through industry.

- Production and marketing of space-based services, including launch services and space-based applications like transponder leasing, remote sensing and mission support services.
- Building of Satellites (both Communication and Earth Observation) as per user requirements.
- Transfer of technology developed by ISRO centres/ units and constituent institutions of Dept. of Space.
- Marketing spin off technologies and products/ services emanating out of ISRO activities.
- Consultancy services.
- Recently, the Government of India has created the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe), an independent nodal agency under the Department of Space, to provide a boost to the private sector participating in space-related activities or using India's space resources.

Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle

- India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) is the third generation launch vehicle.
- PSLV is the first launch vehicle which is equipped with liquid stages.
- PSLV's first successful launch was in October 1994. PSLV was used for two of the most important missions. These are Chandrayaan-1 in 2008 and Mars Orbiter Spacecraft in 2013.
- Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mark II and GSLV MkIII are other two launch vehicles.
- GSLV Mk II is the largest launch vehicle developed by India, which is currently in operation. This fourth generation launch vehicle is a three stage vehicle with four liquid strap-ons. The indigenously developed cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS), which is flight proven, forms the third stage of GSLV Mk II.
- GSLV MkIII, chosen to launch Chandrayaan-2 spacecraft, is a three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle developed by ISRO. The vehicle has two solid strap-ons, a core liquid booster and a cryogenic upper stage.
- GSLV Mk III is designed to carry a 4 ton class of satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) or about 10 tons to Low Earth Orbit (LEO), which is about twice the capability of the GSLV Mk II.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana

Recently, electric pottery wheels to 100 potter families in Maharashtra were distributed under the Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana (KSY) of Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

Key Points

Kumhar Sashaktikaran Yojana (KSY) was launched in 2018.

- **Aim:** To strengthen and improve the living of potters in the country by making them self reliant (Atma Nirbhar).
- **Features:** Providing potters with modern equipment and training to reconnect them with the society and revive their art.
- **Implementation:** KVIC has created proper marketing channels including tie-up with the Indian Railway for selling the products of potters.
- **Benefits:** Proper training and distribution of advanced equipment under the scheme has eliminated drudgery from the process of pottery making and also resulted in increasing the production by 3-4 times.
- This has led to an increase in income of potters manifolds.
- **Other Initiatives for Potters:** The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has announced expansion of and doubling of support to potters. This include:
 - Encouraging successful traditional potters to set up units under the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) scheme.
 - PMEGP is a credit-linked subsidy scheme which promotes self-employment through setting up of micro-enterprises.
 - Setting up of clusters in Terracotta, Red clay pottery, with new innovative value added products to build pottery to crockery/tile making capabilities under the SFURTI scheme.
 - The Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) aims to make traditional industries more productive and competitive by organizing the traditional industries and artisans into clusters.

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- KVIC is a statutory body established under the Khadi and Village Industries Commission Act, 1956.
- The KVIC is charged with the planning, promotion, organisation and implementation of programmes for the development of Khadi and other village industries in the rural areas in coordination with other agencies engaged in rural development wherever necessary.
- It functions under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Qns. Signing of various defence agreements will allow India and the US to act together and get into a better position to shape the regional and global environment. Critically analyse in the light of recently signed Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement. (250 words)

Ans.

The defence agreements between India and the US allow India to use US expertise on geospatial intelligence and to enhance military accuracy of automated hardware systems and weapons like cruise, ballistic missiles and drones.

- BECA is one of the four foundational military communication agreements between the two countries. The other three being GSOMIA, LEMOA, CISMOA.
- General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA): It allows militaries to share the intelligence gathered by them. Signed by India in 2002.
- Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA): It allows both countries to have access to each other's designated military facilities for refueling and replenishment. It was signed by India in 2016.
- Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (COMCASA): It is the India specific version of CISMOA. Valid for 10 years, COMCASA aims to provide a legal framework for the transfer of highly sensitive communication security equipment from the USA to India that will streamline and facilitate interoperability between their armed forces.

Significance of Signing of BECA

- Converging Indo-Pacific Strategies: Signing of BECA will fast-forward the integration of the Indo-Pacific strategies of their two countries.
- Further, this is in sync with increasing formalization of QUAD, which can be seen in the recent joining of Australia in the Malabar naval exercises.
- India will be able to keep a close watch on the movements of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean.
- Moreover, its signing comes at a time when India is locked in one of its most hostile standoffs with China along their disputed border in the Himalayan region.
- Deep Military Implications: While LEMOA means one partner trusts the other enough to expose its valuable assets, COMCASA means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems to connect the two militaries, and BECA means it can share highly classified information in real time without fear of being compromised.
- All this signals the level of trust that has developed between the two countries and their militaries, faced with an increasingly aggressive China.
- BECA allows more intensive engagement between the armed forces —from interoperability to intelligence-sharing and joint defence research to production of weapons.
- Multi-Polar World Order: Substantive and institutionalised cooperation between the two defence establishments will serve the long-term interests of a rising India and an America that is restructuring its global security burden.

Associated Issues

- India's Aversion to Alliance System: Signing of these four foundational agreements would mean India getting strategically more close to US. From the perspective of the US, in order to counter China, it would want India to be getting close to an alliance system.
- However, one aspect which remains unchanged is the Indian strategic establishment's aversion to the term alliance.
- Dependence on Russia: India is one of the world's biggest defence equipment buyers, but around 60-70% of its inventory is supplied by Russia.
- Further, the US wants India to move away from Russian equipment and platforms, as it feels this may expose its technology and information to Russia.
- Compromising Strategic Autonomy: Many foreign policy experts in India are of the view that, by synchronising its systems with those of the US, it will enable the US to enter its decision-making loop.

- Divergence of Foreign Policy Interest: There is divergence on foreign policy interests between US and India, especially relating to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.
- On account of Indian Ocean issues, the US would want India's cooperation in the South China Sea, but India's primary naval challenge is in the western and north-western Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

Signing of defence agreements will allow India and the US to act together and get into a better position to shape the regional and global environment in favour of peace and stability. However, both countries must not glamourize this signing as these agreements are not an end in themselves they are a means to a larger end – security and prosperity of its citizens.

DAILY QUIZ

1. Which of the following earth observation satellites have been launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)?

1. RESOURCESAT- 2
2. CARTOSAT-1
3. Megha-Tropiques
4. SARAL

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2 and 3 only
- c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4**

2. Consider the following statements about National Air Quality Monitoring Program based Dashboard:

1. It is built on the data of CPCB's National Ambient Air Quality Monitoring (NAAQM) Network.
2. Respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM) are not recorded under the National Air Quality Monitoring Programme (NAMP).

Which of the statements given above is/ are not correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only**
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

3. With reference to India-Central Asia Dialogue, consider the following statements:

1. It is a ministerial-level dialogue between India and all the Central Asian countries.
2. All the countries participating in the dialogue are also members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation(SCO).

Which of the statements given above is/ are correct?

- a) 1 only**
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

4. Which of the following defence exercises are held between India and France?

1. Exercise Shakti
2. Exercise Varuna
3. Exercise Indra
4. Exercise Garuda

Choose the correct answer using code given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 3 and 4 only
- d) 1, 2 and 4**

5. With reference to Indo-Tibetan Border Police , consider the following statements:

1. It is a Central Armed Police Forces under the Ministry of Defence.
2. It was raised during the India-Pakistan War in 1971.
3. It also performs other internal security duties.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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