



Conquer Mains Challenge - Day 1

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Welcome to the first ever digital mains test series -Conquer Mains Challenge 50 day initiative for Mains 2018, where questions on GS topics will be posted daily followed up by digital simulated test series for mains the next day. It's one of a kind in India where your answer copies could be evaluated in a very short period of 24 to 48 hours by experts associated with us from all over India.

Instructions

- Get to the homepage of the [website](#)
- Questions will be posted on these topics the next day , click on the Conquer Mains Challenge button on the home screen if you wish to take the test.
- Register to the website by providing relevant details for the first time and authenticate by checking your registered E-mail address otherwise the registration is incomplete.
- Login using ID and password and click on the Conquer Mains Challenge button and click on the following date to start the test.
- Question will be displayed one at a time, there will be time limits according to the marks, after the completion of timer you will be automatically directed to next question.
- After finishing the answers , at the top right corner of the website if you click on your registered name you will come across the student panel button, click on it
- You will be directed to your personalised page to the left column. You will find conquer mains button click on the button, there will be two options 1st one to upload photos of your answer copy and the 2nd one to check your evaluated result
- To upload you have to choose the date first then the options of different questions will appear, photos of answers to every question is to be

uploaded separately by choosing questions from the options above

- Evaluated answers will be found in the same method by choosing date first and the respective questions

GS 1

Lakes

Lakes are temporary features of the crust formed due to accumulation of water in hollows and are connected to rivers by outflows while percolation and evaporation happen as well. Lakes may be natural or manmade.

Lakes have been and are used for multiple purposes:

1. Transport and Communication: Lakes provide means of easy transport for heavy and bulky items like coal, iron, etc. They also act as inland navigation routes. Example: The Great Lakes of North America.
2. Supply of water: Lakes are mostly freshwater bodies. Their water is supplied for domestic uses, for agricultural and industrial uses as well. Initially most of the industries located near lakes for want of water supply and navigation. Moderating effect on climate. If lakes are large enough they produce same effect on climate as seas by means of breezes.
3. Power generation and water flow regulation. Dams are constructed for power generation and they create artificial lakes for ensuring continuous water supply for power. Water can be diverted to agriculture as well. Example: Bhakra Nangal dam.
4. Tourism and adventure activities are promoted in lakes as well. Many health resorts are near lakes. Also, ecology of lake is replete with many species. Salt and minerals can also be extracted from lakes. Example: Great Sambhar Lake of India.

However due to increasing usage of lakes by humans many environmental issues have come up:

1. Excess use of fertilizers and run off of rain water has caused concentration of chemicals in lakes. This has damaged their ecosystem.
2. Untreated sewage, industrial effluents and trash from cities are dumped. This causes degradation of water quality. Amount of dissolved oxygen is altered.
3. Acid rain comes down into lakes as well. Our avenues of freshwater are getting disrupted.
4. Due to chemicals in lakes, fishing activity is reducing. Also, these chemicals are entering our bodies due to bioaccumulation.

If unchecked, the lakes will suffer eutrophication and their surface will be covered by algae and slowly convert into swampy marshes and finally to wetlands. Examples: The Great lakes are suffering, Lake Powai water has been declared unfit for human consumption, and desilting initiatives have been launched in lakes of Delhi as well.

Lake Rejuvenation

It is the lowering down of the base level. In lakes and tanks it is usually done by cleaning in case of waste dumping and desiltation in case of sedimentation in dams, so as to restore its original capacity of holding water.

Measures adopted to rejuvenate lakes and tanks in India:

1. National lake conservation plan: The objective of the scheme is to restore and conserve the urban and semi urban lakes and other unique freshwater eco systems of the country that are degraded due to waste water discharge, through an integrated ecosystem approach.
2. Introduction of biological predator (insects, fungi, herbivorous fish) to remove the floating vegetation.
3. Using wetland and spillway which will help mitigate sediment and nutrient flow in the lake from surrounding water sources.
4. Mission kakatiya is a program of restoring all the tanks and lakes in Telangana State, India.
5. Implementation of solid waste management rules 2016 also might help in lake rejuvenation
6. Fixing the boundary of lakes and removal of encroachment.
7. Diversion of sewerage water entering the lakes.
8. New bund formation, strengthening of existing bund, waste removal and desilting to increase water storage
9. Finally, while lake rejuvenation also involves fixing lake boundaries, fencing, dewatering, desilting, beautification, etc., all these are being addressed
10. NGOs, including Reliance Foundation, and the corporate social responsibility arm of the construction company, Larsen and Toubro, are also excavating and cleaning some water bodies in some villages in Karnataka.

Benefits to Farmers

- Farmers are getting a bountiful supply of tankbed soil to be used as top soil, as the government has taken up tank cleaning and dredging work. The top soil is good for agriculture as it is rich in organic matter and humus, besides cleaning of tank also increases their water holding capacity.
- Covering Red soil fields with top soil will help farmers considerably. It will also help improve the water holding capacity of the waterbodies.
- In the regions like Punjab where groundwater has been exploited rejuvenation of Lakes and tanks works as a rain harvesting method where water is stored and provides water security.
- Lakes that are unable to sustain any marine life due to silt, or shallow water

levels could be developed to support large scale fish farming.

- These measures will provide water security and also have economic incentives in places where silt can be used for farming.
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Violence Against Women (Global Perspective)

According to recent report the magnitude of violence against women is still very serious after 20 years of Beijing Declaration on women rights.

Under current scenario:

1. Around the world, ~ 35% women have experienced sexual or physical violence from intimate/non intimate partners.
2. One in 10 girls under 18 was forced to have sex.
3. Reportage of cases of violence is miniscule Sex selective abortions in developing countries [India, Armenia etc.] are on rise.
4. Many women have been kept as sex slaves in African and Middle East countries (+ISIS) Cases of domestic violence are on rise and are mostly under reported

India specific data

- Crimes against women increased 34 percent over the last four years to 2015, with cruelty by husbands and relatives being the most widely reported crime, according to the latest data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)
- The year 2016 saw the lowest conviction rate (18.9%) - percentage of cases convicted to cases in which trials were completed by the courts - for crimes against women

Last century has seen significant progress in empowerment of women like:

- Access to primary and higher education
- Participation in work forces ,driven by globalization
- Falling pay gap between men and women
- Falling female mortality rate and Gender Inequality Gap, rising political empowerment

Still progress in reducing violence against women has been slow due to:

- Under the basis of cultural issues many countries have not legislated punitive laws for violence against women [Arab countries] or

- Adjudication process being very slow [India].
- Domestic violence and marital rape, which consists of significant chunk, not being criminal offences in many countries [like India, Nigeria].
- Still gaps of income, literacy, political participation exist
- Many countries in Middle East, South Asia are facing hostile situations [Communal violence, internal migrations, forced conversions], in which women are soft targets.

Under this scenario serious global effort is required to mitigate violence against women and accelerate the process of empowerment like:

- Mitigation of violence against women should be achieved as it is one of targets in Sustainable Development Goals and shown real progress by member countries in time bound manner
- Start of campaigns for women empowerment, These activities help to women in distress and end to violence against them in a brisk pace if adopted on the model of Polio Elimination/Climate Agreements.
- Make funding commitments from member countries [+World Bank] to support such programs and incentives for countries doing real progress in this direction
- Make 'end to violence against women' as one of primary criteria for international funding
- Need for speedy adjudication of cases, comprehensive criminal laws covering all sorts of violence against women and international pressure and sanctions against countries who do not recognise equal rights of women under pretexts of their local culture

GS-2

Right to Information (RTI) Act

The Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted by parliament in 2005 to empower citizens, promote accountability and transparency in the working of the government and contain corruption. It has completed 10 years of implementation in which it has changed the thinking and the style of functioning of government machinery.

Positive effects

- Despite challenges in RTI act, people have used it fiercely and owned the law like no other.
- In the unequal battle of trying to hold power to account, it offers sense of hope

for the human desire for dignity, equality, & the capacity to enforce these to some extent.

- RTI addresses the issue of constitutional rights and empowers people to demand answers – basis of democracy. It encourages a culture of asking questions in ordinary people.
- It can help us escape from policy paralysis, and build a more informed, equitable and robust decision-making process.

Beside good governance RTI has helped in the development process as well:

- Effective delivery of socio-economic services, awareness and realization of entitlements
- Guarantee of income and Food Security: Reduction in leakages and corruption in social welfare schemes, better scrutiny, allocation of resources, effective delivery of services
- Human Capital: Education and Health Care: Schemes like SSA, National Rural Health Mission are better implemented

Critical Analysis of Performance of RTI

Right to Information Act was hailed as an important event in the democracy of India. It provided people with power to gain information and to use that information to assert their other rights and provide a check on the working governmental authorities by bringing transparency and accountability.

But the implementation of RTI act did not happen as was imagined:

1. There are many areas which are out of limits of RTI act (Even, application of RTI to judiciary and legislature is limited).
2. The exclusion of law enforcement agencies is major cause of discontent of RTI supporters.
3. Disregard of announcements of Chief Information Commission by political parties indicate the lack of power to enforce the rulings of CIC.
4. The recent controversy of non appointment of CIC for a long-time shows the apathy of government towards the act.
5. Official Secrets Act, framed by colonial power still restricts much information out of the purview whether they did not have any relevance to security and integrity of India. For example Correspondence related to Subhash Chandra Bose.
6. All the government organisations were asked to put in public general information but this was not followed by many institutions and there is no deadline to this provision.
7. Appointment of IC is partisan
8. Information is presented in a technical language by government departments
9. Maintenance of information is not automated and efficient
10. Awareness of act is low among masses

11. Costs is sometimes high
12. Bureaucratic pre-eminence in information commissions results in promotion of traditional bureaucratic ethos of secrecy and lack of accountability.

Statistics related to RTI

- Information commissions (ICs) imposed the penalty for denial of information (in violation of the RTI Act) in only 1.3% of the cases where penalty was imposable. This promotes a culture of impunity.
- Despite the dictum of the Supreme Court, more than 60 per cent of the IC orders analysed contained deficiencies in terms of not recording critical facts. This leads to failure in furnishing information in stipulated time of 30 days.
- Rajasthan and Bihar's State Information Commissions (SIC) were the worst performers, with 74 per cent and 73 per cent of the orders not describing the information sought.
- The collective backlog in the disposal of appeals and complaints in the 16 SICs studied, was an "alarming 1,87,974 cases pending.
- The Chief Information Commission (CIC) saw a rise in pendency of 43 per cent.
- Public authorities have been stubbornly reluctant to submit their RTI statistics reaching as low as 67.5% in 2010-11 who followed the rule.
- There are at least 50 lakh RTI applications filed in India every year Over the last decade, at least 2 per cent of the Indian population has used the law.

Performance wise other than the implementation failure, RTI is effectively been used by activists even at the cost of their life. Various Public Interest Litigations are filed in courts to change the course of executive. The base of recent check on public advertisement was based on the findings of RTI. RTI is a strong tool to use the democratic space provided in India. Some problems still remain in implementation and provisions but overall RTI is effectively use by many activists and can provide a check on excessive and unnecessary power of executive and other governmental bodies.

Way forward

While the Civil Society Organizations and Media can act as pressure points, most of the correctives need to be carried out by the Government and Information Commissions. These include:

One, there is a need for a sustained mass awareness campaign both at Central and State levels to increase public awareness about the RTI and its operation, encourage citizen involvement, and increase transparency within the government. The Information Commissions can play an important role in this regard.

Two, there is a need for greater voluntary disclosure of information held with public Authorities. Section 4 of the Act provides for an elaborate manual for

mandatory disclosure on various aspects of structure and functioning of Public Authorities and requires that they make suo-motu disclosure in public interest. This is the essential ingredient for broadening and deepening of the transparency regime.

Third, we have to rid ourselves of the old mindset regarding secrecy of government processes and transactions. Concerns have been expressed in some quarters that the disclosure of information inhibits free and open expression of opinion by government officials during the decision-making process. If the officials have approached the issues with honesty and in accordance with the rules, then this argument does not seem justified. The benefits of disclosure of information far outweigh the inconveniences experienced by the decision-makers in the government. There is a need to sensitize the public functionaries about the Right to Information and incorporate training module on RTI in all government training programmes.

Fourth, the person demanding information under the RTI should be emboldened and secure. Of late, there have been reports of attack and assault on information seekers. This is disquieting and needs to be taken seriously and prevented. Even if the number of such reported cases is small, this shows the vulnerability of information seekers.

GS 3

Prices of agricultural products and MSP

Why do farmers suffer:

- Good rains, excessive sowing and the bumper harvest last year produced gluts in the market that sent the prices of many crops, and therefore farm incomes, crashing.
- None of the economic tools available for protecting farm incomes the price support scheme, the price stabilisation fund and the market intervention scheme was employed to the best advantage.
- Although MSPs are announced for more than 20 crops, noteworthy procurement is conducted for three: paddy, wheat and sugarcane
- Procurement frequently takes places at prices below the MSP, as is happening this year, according to reports. Finally, small and vulnerable farmers usually do

not get paid MSPs at all, as they sell their produce to aggregators, not directly in mandis.

- Gluts, depressed market prices and mounting farmer losses are a direct consequence of the malfunction in agro-pricing policies.
- Despite a bumper crop last year, farmers are not satisfied with the procurement price. They are, therefore, unable to repay loans they have taken, both from institutional sources and private moneylenders.
- The small and marginal land holdings (less than 2 hectares) account for 72% of land holdings, and this predominance of small operational holdings is a major limitation to reaping the benefits of economies of scale.
- Since small and marginal farmers have little marketable surplus, they are left with low bargaining power and no say over prices.
- Risk because of pests, diseases, shortage of inputs like seeds and irrigation, which could result in low productivity and declining yield; the lower remunerative price; the absence of marketing infrastructure and profiteering by middlemen adds to the financial distress of farmers.
- Also, the predominance of informal sources of credit, mainly through moneylenders, and lack of capital for short term and long term loans have resulted in the absence of stable incomes and profits.
- Farmers face price uncertainties due to fluctuations in demand and supply owing to bumper or poor crop production and speculation and hoarding by traders.
- The costs of farm inputs have increased faster than farm produce prices.
- The absence of a robust market for buying and selling forward-looking contracts
- Uncertain policies and regulations such as those of the Agricultural Produce Market Committee, besides low irrigation coverage, drought, flooding and unseasonal rains, are some other factors that hit farmers hard.

Increasing MSP has its advantages:

1. Incentivise production of a specific food crop which is in short supply.
2. Protects farmers from any sharp fall in the market price of a commodity.
3. Ensures that the country's agricultural output responds to the changing needs of its consumers. Ex: The government hiked the MSP of pulses to expand sowing of pulses.
4. Higher farm profits will encourage farmers to spend more on inputs, technology etc
5. Protect farmers from the unwarranted fluctuation in prices, provoked by the international level price variations.

But implementation of Swaminathan MSP seemingly does not end the agrarian distress because of the following reasons:

1. Mechanically finalizing MSP with regards to the cost of production alone does not seem proper. One needs to consider several factors such as its impact on cost of living, world market rate, change in raw materials cost and availability to name a few.

2. Simply increasing MSP to 50% will only benefit farmers producing high quantity of farm produce. Most of the Indian farmers follow subsistence farming, so increasing MSP alone will not bring a drastic change in their lives.
3. Already developed countries are unhappy with Indian subsidies as evident from the Doha development round talks. They are pressurizing India to reduce subsidies. Such an increase in MSP would again make issues in different economic forums.
4. Increasing MSP would result in farmers giving their produce to the govt agencies like FCI, which would result in increase in dumping of food grains in govt. go downs than making them available in consumer market.
5. Increasing MSP would lead to increase in cost of other consumer goods which would again add to the incidence of poverty.
6. MSP will not benefit for the long term. It will only provide marginal increase in profit for a short time.

In effect, increasing MSP will not address the agrarian distress prevailing now. Rather than focusing on MSP, govt. should take steps to benefit the farmers in the long time. These include a rapid change in farm technology ,improving storage and warehouse facilities and cold storage chains based on PPP model, increasing the skill set for the farmers, absorbing the agrarian sector workers to the other sectors to name a few.

Way forward

- Recommendations by NITI aayog:-
 1. The awareness to farmers and timely dissemination of information till the lowest level so that it would increase the bargaining power of the farmers.
 2. Timely payment should be ensured.
 3. MSP should be announced well in advance of the sowing season so as to enable the farmers to plan their cropping.
 4. Improved facilities at procurement centres, such as drying yards, weighing bridges, toilets, etc.
 5. More godowns should be set up and maintained properly for better storage and reduction of wastage.
 6. The criteria for fixing MSP should be current year's data and based on more meaningful criteria rather than the historical costs
- The ambitious projects like e-NAM, doubling farmer's income by 2022, price stabilisation fund, implementation of Swaminathan and Shanta Kumar committee is required.

Space weaponization

In News:

- Technological developments in space have opened opportunities for many

benefits to humanity including global communication systems and geological and meteorological information.

- 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which is a framework for space activities, specifically allows for space weaponization. It prohibits weapons of mass destruction in orbit, but it allows for any other type of weapon anywhere except for the surface of planets, moons and asteroids.
- Recently US made an announcement about the creation of a “space force” or a sixth branch of the American armed forces.

Implications:

Positive:

- Dominance: of the space domain is essential for the US’ role as the sole global superpower and for exercising influence over other nations.
- Defensive and offensive: capabilities Space weapons would provide more effective defensive and offensive capabilities. They would also contribute towards a comprehensive BMD(Ballistic Missile Defence) architecture.
- First mover advantage: Other nations would vie for, and surely fill, any void that is left by the US and this would be detrimental to its own survival.

Negative:

- Trust and cooperation destroyed: The war in space would destroy the intrinsic trust and cooperation necessary to maintain the systems deployed in space for peaceful purposes.
- Commercial satellites: It would put at risk the entire range of commercial satellites as well as those involved in scientific explorations.
- Space debris: The problem of space debris, radio frequencies and orbital slots are some of the other alarming issues that would get intensified with the arms race
- Fragility of the communication systems: Attacking satellites is easy as they travel in predictable targets that can be accurately tracked and, at present, they do not employ counter-measures.
- Arms race: The effect of this approach will likely be an arms race in outer space as other countries move to protect their interests against possible attack from the US.

Implications for India:

- American military goals, which are still undefined in space, could still have consequences for India. While India is officially committed to PAROS, or the prevention of an arms race in outer space, it is yet to formulate a credible official response to the Trump plan.
- India has yet to establish a credible space command of its own. And, its inter-services rivalries will have to be resolved about the command and control.
- China’s reaction could be much stronger than its seemingly muted official response

and it does possess a formidable space military programme that far exceeds current Indian capabilities.

Way forward:-

- More than their war-fighting attributes, space weapons have one principal function — deterrence. India needs to ramp up its research and development initiatives along with negotiating with global powers to adhere to PAROS for a peaceful, accessible and inclusive space
 - There is a need for global commitment to peaceful use of space, India should spearhead this initiative and solidify its space in the multipolar world order as a global leader, the stakes are very high as space plays an important role in the functioning of digital technology
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