

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS paper 2- Indian polity- Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Why Bihar Is Advocating for Special Category Status (SCS)

Special Category Status (SCS) is a classification for states in India that face specific challenges, such as difficult terrain or socio-economic issues. It was introduced in 1969, based on the fifth Finance Commission's recommendations.

Five Factors for SCS: (i) hilly and difficult terrain (ii) low population density and/or sizeable share of tribal population (iii) strategic location along international borders (iv) economic and infrastructural backwardness and (v) non-viable nature of state finances

Benefits of SCS:

Financial Benefits: Previously, SCS states received about 30% of central assistance based on the Gadgil-Mukherjee formula. However, post the 14th and 15th Finance Commission (FC) recommendations and the Planning Commission's abolition, assistance changed to a shared pool of funds, increasing from 32% to 41% for all states.

Favorable Funding Ratios: In SCS states, the Centre-State funding ratio for centrally sponsored schemes is 90:10, more beneficial than the typical 60:40 or 80:20 for the general category.

Additional Incentives: SCS states enjoy concessions in customs, excise duties, income tax, and corporate tax rates to encourage investments and industry setup.

Why does Bihar want SCS?

Economic Backwardness: About one-third of Bihar's population lives in poverty. The state has a low per-capita GDP of around ₹54,000, marking it as one of India's poorest states.

Impact of Bifurcation: Bihar's bifurcation led to industrial decline, with many industries moving to Jharkhand, resulting in fewer employment opportunities.

Natural Challenges: The state faces regular floods in the north and droughts in the south, impacting agriculture and livelihoods.

Need for Welfare Funding: Bihar's Chief Minister highlighted the need for SCS to secure approximately ₹2.5 lakh crore for various welfare measures over five years.

Lack of Resources: Bihar argues its lack of natural resources and continuous water supply for irrigation contributes to its underdevelopment.

Note: States like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha also want SCS. Andhra Pradesh cites revenue loss after bifurcation, and Odisha points to natural disasters and a large tribal population (nearly 22%). However, the Central government, referring to the 14th FC report, has consistently rejected their requests, stating that no state should receive this status.

What should be done?

Reassessing Criteria for SCS: Given Bihar's situation, there's a need to revisit the criteria for SCS, especially considering Bihar meets most except for the hilly terrain and geographically difficult areas.

Alternative Funding Models: Following the Raghuram Rajan Committee's suggestion, exploring

new funding models based on a multi-dimensional index.

Addressing Bihar's Specific Needs: Bihar urgently needs significant support for poverty alleviation, focused aid for disaster management and agriculture, and policies that attract new industries and create job opportunities.

UPSC Syllabus Topic : GS Paper2- Governance- E-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.

Exploring the Purple Sector: Disability Inclusivity and Government Initiatives

The term "purple sector," symbolizing disability with the color purple, encompasses a diverse workforce. This includes individuals with disabilities, special educators, rehabilitation professionals, healthcare workers, and entrepreneurs and innovators focusing on developing products and services for individuals with special needs. It constitutes a substantial and intricately segmented sector.

Significance of DPI in the Purple Sector:

1. **Enhanced Employment Opportunities:** Platforms like DPI facilitate employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, such as transportation apps and educational apps tailored for their needs, like the Namma Yatri app.
2. **Increased Government Revenues:** With around 150 million disabled individuals in India, enhanced employment opportunities contribute to an expanded tax base for the government.
3. **Increased Expenditure in the Economy:** Disabled individuals, along with their friends and families, hold significant spending power. Disability-friendly shopping apps based on platforms like Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) contribute to the economic empowerment of disabled people as both consumers and value-creators.
4. **Social Benefits in Health Care and Education:** Apps focused on health and education for disabled individuals, based on platforms like Open Network for Education and Skilling Transactions (ONEST) and Unified Health Interface (UHI), can provide avenues for skill development and access to specialist healthcare services.

Government Measures for Accessibility:

1. **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016:** This legislation increases the magnitude of reservation for Persons with Disabilities in government jobs and educational institutes.
2. **Accessible India Campaign:** Aimed at creating a barrier-free and conducive environment for Persons with Disabilities, with a focus on the built-up environment, transportation, and the ICT ecosystem.

Way Forward in Building Disability-Friendly Apps:

1. **Discoverability:** Ensure that products and services catering to special needs, including those developed by persons with disabilities, are widely available in the market.
2. **Trust:** Identify the right individuals for various services and initiatives to instill trust in these apps. Prioritize data privacy.
3. **Access:** Products and services should be accessible in both physical and digital formats.

4. **Cost of Innovation:** Focus on lowering the cost of innovation and developing novel products and services for persons with special needs.

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Navigating Challenges in Satellite Broadband: Spectrum Allocation in India

What is Satellite Broadband?

Satellite Broadband refers to internet access provided through communication satellites. It holds the promise of providing internet connectivity for a vast majority of citizens, especially in remote areas like hilly terrains, dense forests, etc.

What is Spectrum Allocation? How is spectrum allocated in India?

Spectrum allocation is the process of dividing the radio frequency spectrum into different frequency bands and assigning them to different users and services. Given that spectrum is a limited resource, it needs to be allocated judiciously to ensure users do not interfere with each other.

In India, spectrum is allocated either through the method of auctions, lotteries, or administrative allocation.

Note: Under an auction model, companies bid for spectrum above the reserve price set by the state allocating such spectrum, whereas, in administrative allocation, the state allocates spectrum to qualified communications companies.

Challenges Faced by Satellite Broadband Companies in Spectrum Allocation:

1. **Lack of Spectrum Allocation Strategy:** Delay on the part of TRAI to recommend the method/strategy to be followed while allocating the spectrum.
2. **Divided House on Spectrum Allocation Strategy:** Companies like Reliance Jio advocate an auction strategy for a level playing field, while companies like One Web India and Starlink favor administrative allocation, considering international trends and non-feasibility of auction in space communication.
3. **Lack of Clarity on Allocation to Foreign Firms:** The government has not formulated guidelines for the allocation of spectrum licenses to foreign firms like Starlink, which have already pioneered satellite broadband technology.
4. **Vacant Position of TRAI Chairman:** The vacancy in the post for the last few months has resulted in further delays in finalizing a spectrum policy for satellite broadband.

What Should Be Done Going Ahead?

1. **Earliest Appointment of TRAI Chairperson:** The government is considering private sector candidates to fill the post, requiring an amendment to the TRAI Act. This must be done expeditiously to ensure no further delays in the body's functioning.
2. **Acting in Unison:** Government departments like the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), TRAI, etc. must act in unison to ensure seamless formulation and implementation of spectrum allocation policies.
3. **Learning from International Experience:** Globally, satellite broadband spectrums have

been allocated through the administrative allocation method, considered a more equitable method of allocation. India can also consider its adoption to allocate spectrum.

These steps are necessary to enable the early launch of satellite broadband in India and further the vision of a 'Digital India.'

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