

**UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3 Indian Economy – Growth and development**

**The Influence of Soft Power on India's Economic Ascendancy**

**India's economy is currently the fastest-growing large economy globally, and it aims to become a 5 trillion dollar economy by the end of the decade. Several factors contribute to India's economic growth:**

**1. Strong Market Foundations:**

- **Large Domestic Market:** India's vast domestic market plays a crucial role in driving economic growth.
- **Sustained Reforms:** Continuous improvements in various sectors enhance economic efficiency and competitiveness. Recent initiatives include the Atmanirbhar Bharat package, production-linked incentive schemes, the national infrastructure pipeline, and labor code bills.

**2. Favorable Demographics (Demographic Dividend):**

- India benefits from a young and increasing population, with more than 40% below the age of 25. This demographic dividend supports a dynamic workforce and consumer base.

**3. Soft Power Contributions:**

- **International Recognition to Yoga:** The celebration of International Yoga Day globally showcases India's cultural heritage.
- **Diversified Sports Sector:** Expansion beyond cricket diversifies India's sports portfolio, attracting investments and international attention.
- **Global Film Industry Achievements:** The success of Indian films, exemplified by 'RRR' and its Oscar-winning song 'Naatu Naatu,' highlights India's cultural influence globally.

**4. Active International Engagement:**

- **Leadership in G20:** India, under its G20 presidency, demonstrated diplomatic acumen in navigating complex geopolitical landscapes.
- **Participation in Quad and IPEF:** Active involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF) underscores India's commitment to regional security and economic collaboration.
- **'Lifestyle for the Environment' (LiFE) Initiative:** India's Prime Minister introduced the LiFE concept at COP26, emphasizing international cooperation for environmental protection.
- **Voice of the Global South:** India advocates for fair and sustainable solutions globally, particularly in areas like energy security, representing the interests of the Global South.

**Terminology:**

- **Soft Power:** Soft power refers to the ability of a country to attract and influence others through culture, political ideas, and policies, rather than relying on military strength alone. India's soft power is evident in its global cultural impact, diplomatic initiatives, and leadership in addressing shared challenges like climate change.

**UPSC Syllabus Topic:GS Paper 3 Agriculture – Public Distribution System – objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; Issues of food security.**

**Challenges Facing NFSA: The National Food Security Act Lacks Crucial Support**

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 was introduced to address India's slow progress in nutrition despite rapid economic growth. It aimed to establish a comprehensive food security system, with the Public Distribution System (PDS) playing a significant role. However, the NFSA sought to go beyond the limitations of the PDS.

The PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) Scheme is a free food grain initiative covering over 57% of India's population. Launched in April 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheme provides each beneficiary with an additional 5 kg of free food grain per month, supplementing the existing PDS provisions. Recently, the Prime Minister announced a five-year extension of the PMGKAY scheme.

**Issues in the current implementation of the NFSA, as highlighted by the author, include:**

1. **Cereal-centric Policy:** The disproportionate focus on rice and wheat contradicts the Act's objective of diversifying the food basket to include pulses, edible oil, and other nutritious foods. This has led to a skewed production structure with India importing pulses and edible oil despite being self-sufficient in rice and wheat.
2. **Political Instrument:** The NFSA has become a political instrument, exemplified by the recent extension of PMGKAY, resulting in the dilution of several original provisions.
3. **Exclusion of Beneficiaries:** Beneficiary coverage remains fixed at 2011 census levels, excluding more than 100 million potential beneficiaries.
4. **Limited Maternity Benefits:** The scheme's provision for maternity benefits has been restricted to only one childbirth, with the amount frozen at Rs. 6,000 per delivery for the past decade.
5. **Limited Hikes for Child-related Provisions:** Both the Integrated Child Development Scheme and the Mid-Day Meal scheme have seen insignificant increases.
6. **Regionally Skewed Distribution:** Despite the Act's emphasis on decentralization and expanded public procurement, distribution remains concentrated, particularly in states like Punjab and Haryana.
7. **Environmental Consequences:** The environmental impact of paddy cultivation, including declining water tables and pollution from stubble burning, poses significant challenges.

The author argues that while expanding the NFSA to a free PDS scheme may yield political benefits, it should not come at the expense of implementing key provisions that aim to establish a framework for improving nutritional and food security.