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## **VAJIRAM & RAVI**

### **Building Urban Infrastructure through AMRUT**

#### **Urban India: Key Statistics**

- As per the **United Nations World Urbanization Prospects Report 2018**, around 34% of India's population lives in cities. By 2031, it is expected to grow by another 6% and by 2051, more than half of nation's population will be living in cities.
- At present, cities **contribute nearly 65% of the country's GDP**, which is likely to go up by 70% by 2030.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- As per census 2011, while 70% of urban households had **access to water supply**, only 49% had **access to water supply within premises**.
- According to CPCB 2015 report, more than 65% of the **wastewater was being discharged untreated** in the open drains resulting in **environmental damage and pollution of water bodies**.
- Water and sanitation program (WSP) of the World Bank (2011) estimated that the total **annual economic impact of inadequate sanitation in India amounted to a loss of Rs. 2.4 trillion in 2006, which is equivalent to about 6.4% of India's GDP**.
- Access to safe drinking water and scientific treatment of wastewater including septage are essential for the country in order to accomplish Sustainable Development Goal 6.

#### **Steps Taken:**

- **Atal mission for rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)**, one of the flagship mission of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), was launched in 500 cities across the country in June 2015.
- Its **aim is to provide** basic services like *water supply to all households, significantly upgrade sewerage and septage and provide for non- motorised transport and public amenities like parks and green spaces at least one in each city*, thus improving the quality of life for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

#### **AMRUT: Aligned with the needs of Urbanising India**

- **Co-operative Federalism**- State Governments have been empowered to appraise, approve and sanction projects for their AMRUT cities- a **departure from the erstwhile Jawahar Lal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM)** wherein individual projects were sanctioned by the then Ministry of Urban Development.
- **Framework for institutional reforms**- AMRUT lays major emphasis on institutional reforms which aim to provide governance and institutional capacities of ULBs.
- **Principles of 'incrementalism' and prioritisation**- A step-wise approach towards service- level benchmarking by the ULBs, a principle of 'incrementalism' has been introduced under the Mission, which is the gradual process of achieving the benchmarks. Recognising the urgent water and sanitation needs, states had to prioritise water supply and sewerage projects- water supply being the first priority.
- **Incentivising over penalising**- In order to encourage states and reward their initiatives constructively, **reform implementation is incentivised under AMRUT**- 10% of the budgetary allocation is earmarked for reform incentive and it is over and above the allocation for projects. This amount is untied and can be used on any item recognized under AMRUT with or without state/ULB share.

- **Monitoring of the Mission-** Programme monitoring is being done at various levels. At state level, State High Power Steering Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary monitors and approves the Mission projects in its entirety.
- At Central level, Apex Committee chaired by the Secretary, MoHUA, approves State Annual Action Plans and monitors the progress. Also, projects are **monitored on real- time basis** via Mission MIS Dashboard with geo-tagging of all projects.

**Urban Reforms**

Some of the significant reforms are as under:

- **Online Building Permission System (OBPS)-** with a view to facilitate Ease of Doing Business in construction permits, OBPS has been operational in Delhi and Mumbai since April 2016. It has been targeted to get OBPS implemented in all cities/towns across the country by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.
- **Replacements of Street Lights with LED lights-** It has led to energy savings and reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emission.
- **Credit Rating-** Four hundred and sixty nine AMRUT cities have been credit rated out of the total 485 cities where the credit rating work has commissioned. Cities with lower rating are following measures to improve their performance so that they become credit worthy and raise funds for their projects.
- **Municipal Bonds-** Rs. 3,390 crore have been raised through municipal bonds during 2017-19 for upgrading urban infrastructure by 8 mission cities (Ahmedabad, Amravati, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Indore, Pune, Surat and Vishakhapatnam).
- Raising of bonds **leads to improved governance, accounting systems, finance, transparency, accountability and delivery of services in the ULBs.** It will also enhance their self-dependence and confidence to serve the citizens.

**Jan shakti Abhiyan-Urban**

- In order to address the national issue of water scarcity, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has undertaken Jal shakti Abhiyan (JSA) from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019.
- The aim is to **make water conservation measures a Jan andolan**, through extensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities across the country in 754 water-stressed cities.
- The Key thrust areas of Jal Shakti Abhiyan (urban) are as follows:
  - **Rainwater Harvesting (RWH)** - to recharge ground water sources and to store water.
  - **Reuse of treated wastewater.**
  - **Rejuvenation of water bodies-** to clean and rejuvenate defunct wells and water bodies.
  - **Plantation-** to mobilise the local community members to conduct plantation drives across the cities.

**Achievements of JSA so far**

- 52344 new rainwater harvesting structures installed
- 1372 water bodies across the country rejuvenated
- More than 6.7 lakh saplings have been planted
- 40099 establishments have started using Treated Waste Water
- More than 3.3 crore participants have been part of the Jan Andolan

**Way Forward:**

- AMRUT has made remarkable strides in improving water and sanitation coverage in urban areas. During the Mission Period, it envisages to cover over 60% of the urban population living in 500 cities with universal coverage of water supply and over 60% coverage of sewerage and septage services.

- However, more than 3,500 smaller cities/towns out of 4,378 statutory towns at present **are not covered under any central scheme** for water supply and Faecal Sludge and septage Management infrastructure.
- It is, therefore, imperative to take forward the achievements of this Mission to these smaller cities as well.

### **Slums in India – Facts and Misconceptions**

**FACT - Official lists under identify slums and undercount slum populations**

- **Census 2001 first included slums** but only in a small number of cities. **Census 2011 was the first to look at this category of settlements in all urban centres.**
- The definition of slums and enumeration methodologies differ among official agencies, but commonly they underestimate the slum population.

**FACT- Slums in each city have a variety of living conditions that fall along the continuum. People's need vary at different points of the continuum. Standardised slum policies are, therefore, not helpful.**

- The **UN- Habitat** employs **five criteria to identify slums**; each related to a living condition that households in slums usually lack: durable housing of a permanent nature; sufficient living space; easy access to safe water; access to adequate sanitation; and security of tenure.
- Residents of slums at different points have diverse needs and require different kinds of public support.

**FACT- Traditional survey methods are inadequate to keep up with rapid changes. Satellite image analysis helps generate slum maps and sort slums into types.**

**MISCONCEPTION: Official notification is required for getting basic services and saleable property titles.**

- The Law lays down that slum residents can only avail themselves of municipal services and property titles after their slum has been officially notified following a prescribed procedure.
- In theory, a city should provide municipal services such as garbage pickup, piped drinking water, sewerage, internal roads, and street lighting- only after a slum has been notified. **Public expenditures cannot be justifiably** incurred for places that **do not exist in the official record.**
- In Practice, many non-notified slums are provided with services and infrastructure, while many notified slums are left uncovered. The scope of corrupt practices gets accelerated by such administrative indiscretions.

**MISCONCEPTION: Lacking property titles, slum residents cannot sell or mortgage properties.**

- In practice, slum properties with all types of papers are freely transacted. An **active informal market exists** that produces official-looking documents.
- It helps buyers and sellers transact informal properties, overcoming the limitations of their property papers. No taxes are paid on these transactions, leading to a loss of potential municipal revenue.

**MISCONCEPTION: Slums are temporary halting points that work as conveyor belts leading rural migrants into urban middle class.**

- **Lack of movement more accurately characterises slum conditions.** Overall, a **situation of stasis- stuck-in-placidness-** is characteristic of slums, whether examined at the household or at the neighbourhood level.
- Improving their prospects for upward mobility requires progressively reducing the risk and vulnerability that are induced by living and work in informal conditions.

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## **VAJIRAM & RAVI**

### **Urbanisation and Informal Sector**

- Growth that is currently taking place **is accompanied by informalisation**, e.g., sub-contracting in the production process and various other mechanisms that **tend to leave labour with less bargaining power**. The informalisation process is feared to involve **substantial welfare losses and deterioration in terms of governance**.
- However, in the face of inadequate livelihood opportunities in the rural areas, even the urban informal sector, which is grossly characterized by low productivity, tends to attract migration.
- This in turn has serious challenges in terms of urbanisation. Though in the Indian context rural-urban migration rates are moderate, rural-to-large city population-flow has always been alarming. Thus, city growth, informal sector employment, and low living standards including slum inhabitation involve considerable overlaps.

#### **Migration and Opportunities:**

- **Higher rural literacy and improvements in educational level** may raise the rural-to-urban migration rate. The **presence of disadvantaged social categories** in the rural areas also has motivated migration rate, supporting the view that they migrate to escape their vulnerability.
- Migration **reduces both rural and urban poverty**. In other words, rural poor by shifting to the urban location are able to access better livelihood opportunities and thus, poverty declines.
- The urban informal sector, notwithstanding the manifestation of low productivity activities, **appears to be better** in comparison to the rural job market scenario.
- **Higher urbanisation and work participation rate** in both rural and urban areas are **positively associated with migration**, suggesting that those in the labour market are more likely to migrate, and after migration they are expected to continue in jobs rather than moving outside the labour force.
- **Migration, urban informal sector employment, and the incidence of socially backward population** in the urban and rural areas are **all positively connected with each other**, suggesting that such groups are more likely migrate and land up in the urban informal sector.
- Though there is **no definite relationship between the size of the informal sector and the extent of urbanisation**, the role of the urban informal sector in providing sources of livelihood cannot be undermined. In fact, with rapid urbanisation **the rural transformation is faster as the positive spill-over effects initiate new activities and opportunities**.
- The other new challenge for urban India can be envisaged in terms of the emergence of the census towns. The constituents of urban areas are **statutory towns, census towns, and outgrowths**.
- The major distinction between statutory and census towns are as follows: All places with a municipality, corporation cantonment board, or notified town area committee constitute statutory towns.
- On the other hand, the **census towns** are defined on the basis of the following criteria: a) A minimum population of 5000; b) At least 75 per cent of the male workers are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits; and c) A density of population of at least 4000 per square Km.
- The results from 2011 census **show a huge number of census towns** which emerged in the last ten years (2001-2011).

#### **What can explain such faster growth of census towns?**

- If we analyse the **locational aspect** of these town we can say that they are **mostly situated in the neighbourhood of very large cities**; these towns may be treated as the **satellite towns** growing in response to the spur of economic activities.

- The number of statutory towns of all sizes is rather **positively associated with the number of census towns** implying that urbanisation as a whole seems to be **expanding from the spill-over of the existing urban localities into the hinterland**.

#### **Are these census towns well equipped to assure a reasonable quality of life?**

- The residential and infrastructural facilities in these towns are **inadequate to keep pace with the new activities** that are spilling over as a result of saturation of the large urban centres. The new towns do not have **enough living space** to accommodate the migrant workers.
- As migration is usually more than the actual number of job vacancies it would mean that the **surplus labour would get residually absorbed in low productivity jobs**.
- Though the very large cities also have had the similar problems, there have been several **support mechanisms** at the same time. Besides, the **real earnings** in the informal sector have been **higher in the large cities** than in smaller towns.
- The capacity of the small towns to provide for the population is highly limited even after discounting for the scale factor that the large cities enjoy. There are problems relating to **generation of resources** required for sustainable development.

#### **Why Spill-over growth is bad?**

- If such new towns **grow purely in response to the dynamics of agriculture growth** and the subsequent demand for trading or other non-agriculture activities, the outcomes are desirable.
- The urbanisation spill-effect which ushers in a **major change in land use patterns** may pose threat not only in terms of food security in short run but also sustainable livelihood for those who lose their agricultural land.
- The mismatch between the demand for and the supply of labour can be serious in these towns keeping in view the employability issue.
- Trade-offs to certain extent between growth and agricultural land are inevitable here. However, sufficient safety nets need to be created to meet the deficiencies and the new challenges.

#### **Conclusion:**

- Once the largest cities exhaust the economic opportunities the second rank cities come up to replace them in terms of investment, growth, and employment generation.
- However, for them to take over the lead role, a **proper coordination** between the state and those who have a thorough understanding of the growth dynamics of the urban space is essential.
- In the Indian context, a **clear-cut initiative for urban investment** or planning is yet to emerge on the basis of the growth potential of different cities and towns with an economic-cum-geographic perspective.

#### **Mobility – Responsive Urban Planning**

- Mobility is increasingly **circular, semi or non-permanent**. Although a bulk of it is regional, many stream of migration are also **long-distance and interstate**.
- This dynamic situation of mobility is at variance with public policies in cities that are being transformed by the presence of and contribution of these migrants.
- This **gap in public policy compels migrants to find solutions outside the formal system**. Such patterns generate a vicious cycle in which both cities and migrants get trapped.

### Wrong Assumptions

- The census data estimates the number of migrants at 3.3 million. However, several studies including the Economic Survey of India 2017 suggest that this is a **significant underestimation**, as it **tend to neglect the short-term and circular migration**.
- Most urban policies, initiated at the central or state level, seemed to have overlooked the emerging forms of mobility that is largely circular and temporary.
- This has led to wrong assumptions that **city dwellers are sedentary** and linkages of citizenship to long-term residence do not fit this emergent form of migration.

### Changing Scale and Forms of Mobility in India

- Economic Survey of India (2016-17) places the estimation of interstate migration at 60 million and inter-district migration at 80 million.
- However, it is important to recognize that there are clear indications that **mobility in India is significantly increasing** and that the forms of this mobility are varied and do not correspond to a permanent move.
- **Two forms which are particularly significant** are: a) commuting and b) circular migration. Both these forms of mobility have implications for the way in which cities are shaped.

### How Mobility Transforms Places?

- Large-scale migration has significant implications for places. **Conventional data measuring more permanent movement** would estimate such implications **in terms of burdens on infrastructure and housing**. However, there is another aspect that is solely associated with temporary form of migration.
- **Temporary forms of migrants** are people who contribute to the city economy while they are there but their **efforts are directed at places which they come from** i.e. the source areas. This is where they **contribute in terms of remittances, investments, asset building, and state revenues**.
- On the other hand, they **contribute significantly** to the economic flows and outputs, **extract less resources from the city**, and bring in new ideas and ways of doing things.
- While work and economic reasons may be the largest drivers for such migration, education and health resource seeking may also be supplementary reasons for the same. These **create specific demands on city infrastructures and services**.
- A neglect of these needs **pushes people into creating their own makeshift solutions**. A road junction is then converted into an 'adda' with tea-food stalls, rest places, footpaths, and roads are subsequently taken over as assembly places.
- On the other hand, a **proactive approach** to migration can lead to significant benefits for the city economy and city vibrancy.

### Need for Vision for Supporting Migrants in Urban Policy: Short-term Housing

- **Short-term housing** is perhaps one of the most critical and unmet needs of migrants to Indian cities. Short-term visitors to cities include all those groups that use city as a resource.
- Needs for stays longer than hotel stays and lesser than rental housing are the most neglected. Housing markets have begun to recognize this need and cater to it through serviced apartments.
- However, there is a **complete absence of options when it comes to the low-income end**. In older days, cities had *dharamshalas*. Contemporary Indian cities lack such options.

- The other **significant barrier** to creating short-term housing solutions lies in the current imagination of housing. **Contemporary housing policies rest upon two broad principles** – the first is **ownership-based housing** and other is **use of land as resource**.
- The first principle helps in **creation of Citizenship**, which in turn secures sustained commitment and investment in a place. Similarly second principle **help to monetise land**.
- However, a **negative impact** of both these policy instruments is that they **limit the possibilities of short-term housing** and undermine the **needs for space** for shelter in cities.

#### **Way Forward:**

- Only local governments with an on-ground knowledge of realities will be able to respond to above discussed challenges as opposed to State Governments who have a more top-down and homogenising view of these issues.
- It is therefore essential to move away from the current State Govt.-based policy onus and **equip local governments** in terms of capacity to cognize such issues, collect data, and to possess the powers and resources to respond to dynamic phenomena such as migration.

### **Mission Indradhanush 2.0: Reiterating India's Commitment to Vaccines for All**

Immunisation programme is a critical component of government's commitment towards Universal Health Coverage. It is integral to India's efforts of reducing the burden of vaccine preventable diseases and achieving universal care for children. Govt had launched '**Expanded Program for Immunisation**' in 1978, which was later termed as the '**Universal Immunisation Program**' (UIP) in 1985. Aim of UIP was to reduce mortality and morbidity among children from vaccine preventable diseases.

#### **Statistics:**

- India's immunization program is the **largest in the world**, with annual cohorts of around 26.5 million infants and 29 million pregnant women. Despite steady progress, routine vaccination coverage has been slow to increase.
- According to the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16), the full immunization coverage is around 62%.

#### **Achievements:**

- India has achieved ground-breaking success in eradicating/eliminating life-threatening vaccine preventable diseases by systematically implementing vaccination programmes.
- These include **small pox, polio and more recently maternal and neonatal tetanus**.

#### **Challenges:**

- The factors limiting vaccination coverage include the rapid urbanization, presence of large migrating and isolated populations that are difficult to reach, and low demand from under-informed and unaware populations.
- Other challenges includes – vast population, poor sanitation and hygiene, difficult geographical terrain that make containing outbreak of disease and increasing access to vaccines difficult.

#### **Strategies to Overcome Challenges:**

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has employed an effective approach – such as involving the community, seeking support from other Ministries and Partner Agencies, establishing an organized surveillance system, and employing mass campaign management strategies to reach every unreached child for vaccination.

**Steps Taken:**

- MoH&FW launched **Mission Indradhanush (MI)** in 2014, to target under-served, vulnerable, resistant and inaccessible populations.
- In October 2017, PM launched **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)** – an ambitious plan to accelerate progress. It aimed to achieve **90% Full Immunisation Coverage** with focus towards districts and urban areas with persistently low levels.
- It was an effort to **shift routine immunization into a Jan Andolan**, or a “peoples’ movement”. It aimed to mobilise communities and deal with barriers to seeking vaccines.
- IMI has contributed to a significant increase in fully immunized children in 190 selected districts in India. IMI showed that **cross-sectoral participation** can be effective in vaccinating children at the highest risk of infection.
- Now the govt. is poised to launch **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI) 2.0** between December 2019-March 2020.
- The aim is to deliver a programme that is informed by the lessons learnt from the previous phases and seeks to escalate efforts to achieve the goal of attaining a 90% national immunization coverage across India.

**Conclusion:**

- With the launch of Intensified Mission Indradhanush 2.0, India has the opportunity to achieve further reductions in deaths among children under five years of age, and achieve the **SDG related to ending preventable child deaths by 2030**.
- Vaccines are a truly critical intervention in this journey, and are the key to safeguarding our present, and building a healthier tomorrow for our future generations.

**Developing Natural Forest Cover: A Case Study From Yadadri, Telangana**

- ‘**Telanganaku Haritha haram**’, is a flagship programme of the State to create an entire forest instead of mere plantation.
- It is thought that forests that have been cleared in diversion cases can be compensated by creating forests instead of plantation.
- This leads to exploration of the principles of Professor Akira Miyawaki, a well known Japanese botanist and plant ecologist.
- He invented the **Miyawaki restoration technique** to **protect the lowland areas against natural calamities like tsunami**. The basic principle of this technique is to initiate high density plantation in small piece of land with native tree species that can protect the low-lying areas from natural disaster.

**YNF Model:**

- A method of developing a **natural forest in the degraded forest areas is developed in a cost effective manner** and is known as **Yadadi Natural Forest (YNF) Establishment Model**.
- The principles of Miyawaki method and local practices and local materials are utilized in developing this model. Establishment cost of the YNF model is arrived at Rs. 2 lakh/acre or Rs. 5 lakh/hectare.

**Conclusion**

A successful YNF model can be revolutionary intervention towards increasing the greenery, climate amelioration and wasteland development.



## Addressing Stubble Burning With Cooperative Model

Pollution by stubble burning has become an annual phenomenon in large parts of northern India.

### Why Farmers are Burning Stubble?

- Managing the stubble **becomes a constraint** for the farmers because of the **adopted cropping pattern**.
- The only reason to burn this asset that can yield income and fertility to the soil is the **small gap of time** between harvesting of paddy and sowing of wheat, the other main crop.
- Also, the farmers have **limited access to dispose the straw**, clean the land and prepare the seed bed for wheat well in time.

### Growth of paddy Cultivation in Punjab

- Rice was **not a traditional crop of Punjab**; but with increased availability in electricity, the number of tube wells increased, which in turn increased the areas for cultivation of paddy replacing the area under cultivation of pulses and other commercial crop.
- Punjab had been **contributing about 60 per cent of the share** in the food stocks of paddy even with only 1.5 per cent of the area.
- Apart from burning of paddy straw, the state has other problems like overuse of chemicals, depleting in the water table etc.
- The **Minimum Support Price (MSP) was provided to paddy** along with its marketing assurance by State Procurement. There are only two crop, wheat and paddy, that have assured marketing through state procurement.

### Strategies to Deal with the Problem

#### A. Cooperative Model

- Reduction of the sizeable area under paddy would not be a feasible alternative in order to ensure enough food stock.
- Therefore, the **issue of straw burning has to be settled through other measures** like *manufacturing of paper and cardboard, production of mushroom where paddy straw can be used as raw material, etc.*
- But there is skepticism that an individual farmer may not install such a unit irrespective of the size of the farm he is holding. Also, a single unit even of the largest size **cannot be economical** because the straw is spread throughout the area and transportation to a single point would be a constraint.
- Therefore, the **Cooperative Model**, already experienced in the dairy, is the **most viable and prudent option** in addressing this problem.
- There is a need of at least two cardboard and paper manufacturing units in every block.
- A cooperative society in the area with the membership of local farmers and farm laborers can be formed and such units must be affiliated to the apex body of the State federation of cooperative for rice straw management.
- Such patronization can yield the most desirable results **not only to tackle this problem but also to generate income and employment** in the state.

#### B. Production of Biogas

- **Production of biogas** needs technical help and extension services. The cooperative umbrella of the same pattern can however help the farmers and farm labourers throughout the State in this venture.

**C. Assured Marketing of Other Crops**

- In Punjab 89% of the farmers have their holding less than 10 acers. These farmers are therefore unable to take any risk either of volatile price or of marketing. In case of rice, price and marketing is assured.
- The same assurance has to be granted for the alternative crops to increase the area of cultivation under them.

**Conclusion:**

Stubble burning has to be stopped. But it should be dealt sympathetically with the alternative measures, and cooperative model stands out to be the most appropriate approach to address this problem, which is more viable and sustainable.

**Consumer Protection Act, 2019: A New Milestone in Empowering Consumers**

- The Consumers Protection Act (CPA), 1986 being the foremost legislation for protecting the rights of the consumers had become **archaic**.
- Also, it **does not cover rapid change** in the consumer marketplaces, especially those dealing with online shopping, teleshopping, product recall, unsafe contracts, and misleading advertisements.
- Therefore, it was felt to replace it with the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. It provides for the protection of consumers and fast – track alternatives so that justice reaches to the aggrieved consumers immediately.
- Innovative methods such as **mediation, establishment of Central Consumer Protection Authority, class action suits** etc. would be part of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

**CPA, 1986**

- It provided a legislative framework for better protection of the interests of the consumer by creating a formal but **three- tier quasi-judicial dispute resolution** mechanism at National State, and District levels exclusively for consumers.
- The Consumer Court were established with twin objectives for speedy redressal of consumer complaints and establish quasi-judicial authorities unlike civil courts to provide compensation to the consumers.

**Shortcomings in the CPA, 1986**

- (a) The CPA, 1986 has become **outdated and does not consider rapid changes** in consumer marketplace. Due to heavy pendency of cases and frequent adjournments, delay in getting justice takes place.
- (b) The consumer commissions have been **overburdened with pending cases** and the buyer-seller contract is tilted in favour of the seller.
- (c) There are **more than 400 posts** of president and members in various consumers forums which **are lying vacant**. The State Governments shows less interest in immediately filling up the vacant posts and the issue of consumer protection is not always at the top of any political parties' agenda.
- (d) Consumer commission are functioning with staff deputed from other departments **who do not have any experience in judicial practices**.
- (e) It is seen that the **award ordered** by consumer commissions is **very meagre** and the **consumer has to run from pillar to post to get the orders implemented**.

- (f) There has been **lack of proper coordination** among the president and members of the consumer commissions for timely adjudication of cases and quite often around ten or fifteen adjournment are allowed.
- (g) The president of the National Commission/State Commissions are **not empowered to take up suo motu action** in consideration of the damages affecting a sizable number of population, e.g., misleading advertisements.

**Consumer Protection Act, 2019**

Some of the highlights of the Consumers Protection Act, 2019 are

- (a) The definition of ‘Consumer’ would include both offline and online consumers.
- (b) Establishment of the **Central Consumers Protection Authority** (CCPA) which can act on:
  - i. Complaints of unfair trade practices,
  - ii. Issue safety guidelines,
  - iii. Order product recall or discontinuation of services,
  - iv. Refer complaints to other regulators,
  - v. Has punitive powers such as imposing penalties,
  - vi. Can file actions before consumer commission, and
  - vii. Intervene in proceeding in matters of consumer rights or unfair trade practices.
- (c) The **pecuniary jurisdiction** of adjudicatory bodies increased in case of District Commission to Rs. 1 crore, in case of State Commission between 1 crore to 10 crore, and for National Commission, above Rs 10 crore.
- (d) The bill also **lists punitive action** against those who are found to be manufacturing, storing, disturbing, selling, or importing products that are spurious or contain adulterants.
- (e) Provisions for “**product liability**” **action** for or on account of harm caused by or resulting from any product by way of fixing the liability of a manufacturer to a claimant.
- (f) Provision for “**mediation**” **as an Alternate Dispute resolution** mechanism, thus making the process less cumbersome, simple, and quicker.
- (g) **Other Important aspects of the act include** - Simplifying the consumer dispute adjudication process, enhancing the pecuniary jurisdiction of the consumer dispute redressal agencies, increasing minimum number of member in the consumer for a, power to review their own orders by the State and district commission, **Constitution of ‘circuit bench’** to facilitate quicker disposal of complaints.
- (h) E-commerce guidelines would be mandatory under consumer protection law, which would include **14-day deadline to effect refund request**. The e – commerce companies would also be required to ensure that personally identifiable information of customers are protected.

CCPA would function on the same lines as the **Federal Trade Commission** in the USA and investigate into consumer complaints, issue safety notices for goods and services, and pass orders for recall of goods and work against misleading advertisements.

**Conclusion:**

The consumer’s protection Act, 2019, with its innovative change, would help in empowering consumers and provide justice to the needy in time.