If you are getting help from Banking Chronicle, then please support BankingChronicle.co.in by Clicking 1 Ad Daily on the website.

Note: Just 1 Ad, not more than 1. Support Us to Support YOU!
RRB COMBO

RRB
PO/CLERK
REAL EXAM
LEVEL 20+20
MOCK TEST
IN HIN & ENG

399/-

STUDY MATERIAL PDF’S - https://www.instamojo.com/ankushlamba411/
A new course

President’s address should have fleshed out PM Modi’s agenda of winning the trust of all

President Ram Nath Kovind’s address to the joint sitting of Parliament set out the philosophy and priorities of the Narendra Modi government that has been re-elected. It outlined the rupture that has come to characterise Mr. Modi’s politics, marked by his 2014 victory, and pointedly ignored the progress India had made during earlier years. The President said his government was “committed to that very idea of nation-building, the foundation for which was laid in 2014.” Harnessing the thoughts of social reformer Sree Narayana Guru and Rabindranath Tagore to emphasise brotherhood among all sections and the celebration of the human spirit would have been uplifting if only the rest of the speech dwelt on those ideas in some detail and with force. In the absence of elaboration, such grand intent in the initial paragraphs was not reassuring. The Prime Minister’s newly added objective of winning the trust of all governed, Sabka vishwas, was not fleshed out meaningfully. Sardar Patel, Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi found mention, but not Jawaharlal Nehru, the founding Prime Minister whose vision and unfailing commitment to secularism, pluralism and progress set the Republic on a sustainable course.

The ‘New India’ that the President mentioned is a departure from that founding vision, and there was no ambiguity on that aspect. He struck a chord with the constituency of the government, but not with all. The notion that there is a non-sectarian development agenda that is impervious to identity politics is good to have, and the Prime Minister’s evangelical fervour in driving its schemes is laudable. But triumphalism around many schemes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission has deflected public attention from the serious tasks ahead and an honest discussion on achievements. New focus on water conservation and management and the rural economy is not a moment too early. These are critical areas. Mr. Kovind also spoke of the government’s intent to expand scientific research and higher education. A speech by the President is significant not for the technical details it offers, but for the vision. The cultural nationalist agenda of the ruling dispensation that has made intellectual curiosity and academic integrity dangerous in India is not the route to any of these goals. The restrictions on cattle trade and violence against those employed in it — mostly Muslims and Dalits — have not merely become a protracted communal conflict but are also among the factors that have pushed the rural economy off the rails. Announcing yet another scheme for cattle, as the President did, is not confronting the real, self-inflicted problem. What differentiates one dispensation from another is not the material ambitions but the social purpose and direction of such pursuits. The clarity on that aspect in the address may be stimulating for many, but certainly not good for India.
A stable planet

India is set to become the most populous nation; improving the quality of life is crucial

The key message from the UN’s World Population Prospects 2019 report is that national leaders must redouble their efforts to raise education, health and living standards for people everywhere. India is projected to become the most populous country by 2027 surpassing China, and host 1.64 billion people by 2050; the world as a whole could be home to 8.5 billion people in just over a decade from now, and the number could go up to 9.7 billion by mid-century. The projections should be viewed in perspective, considering that alarmist Malthusian fears of inability to provide for more than a billion people on earth did not come true. Yet, there are strong arguments in favour of stabilising population numbers by raising the quality of life of people, and achieving sustainable development that will not destroy the environment. The UN report shows migration to countries with a falling ratio of working-age people to those above 65 will be steady, as those economies open up to workers to sustain economic production. Japan has the lowest such ratio, followed by Europe and the Caribbean; in over three decades, North America, Eastern and Southeastern Asia will join this group. India meanwhile will have a vast number of young people and insufficient natural resources left for exploitation. Preparing for the changes and opportunities migration offers will depend on a skills revolution.

At the national level, achieving a reduction in fertility rates in States such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh — which are high as per Sample Registration System data — is a challenge for India as it seeks to stabilise population growth. This is possible if the State governments set their minds to it. They must singularly focus on improving education and health access for women, both of which will help them be gainfully employed. On the other hand, a rise in life expectancy has brought with it a policy imperative that is bound to become even more important in coming decades. A growing population of older adults is a certainty, and it opens up prospects for employment in many new services catering to them. Urban facilities have to be reimagined, with an emphasis on access to good, affordable housing and mobility. The Sustainable Development Goals framework provides a roadmap to this new era. But progress in poverty reduction, greater equality, better nutrition, universal education and health care, needs state support and strong civil society institutions. Making agriculture remunerative and keeping food prices stable are crucial to ensure nutrition for all. India is set to become the most populous nation. For its leaders, improving the quality of life for its people will be a test of political will.

Smart diplomacy in five moves

India needs to see through many balancing acts to deal with regional tensions
The nature and dynamics of Southern Asian geopolitics are undergoing a radical transformation, slowly, steadily and in an irrevocable manner. One of the world’s most volatile regions and hitherto dominated by the United States, Southern Asia is today at an inflection point with far-reaching implications for the states in the region, and for India in particular. Is New Delhi adequately prepared to weather the incoming geopolitical storm?

To begin with, there is a sharp, though often understated, great power competition in the region with the U.S. caught between its reluctance to part with its quickly fading glory on the one hand and unwillingness to do what it takes to maintain its regional influence on the other. And yet, when challenged by China and Russia in the regional geopolitical landscape, the U.S.’s superpower instinct is to push back, often leading to short-sighted decisions and confused policies. The resultant geopolitical competition for space, power and influence in the regional scheme of things is undoing the traditional geopolitical certainties in Southern Asia. Russia and China are jointly and individually challenging the U.S.’s pre-eminence and drafting smaller countries of the region into their bandwagon/s.

Despite our unease and traditional suspicion towards great power system shapers and managers, the simple fact is that a benign unipolarity or a balanced multipolarity with some amount of great power concert is generally better than unbalanced multipolarity. Unbalanced multipolarity when combined with a situation of power transition in the regional sub-system, as is perhaps the case today, might prove to be destabilising. We are perhaps at the cusp of such a moment in Southern Asia.

**The China pivot**

Then there is the emergence of the ‘China pivot’ in the region. Washington’s role as the regional pivot and power manager is becoming a thing of the past with Beijing increasingly able and willing to assume that role. Regional geopolitics, from Iran to Central Asia and from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean region, is increasingly being shaped by China. China is the new regional hegemon with states in the region jumping on its bandwagon without much resistance. When new powers are on an ascendance, its neighbours tend to recalibrate their policies and old partnerships and alliances. Regional holdouts and challengers such as India will need to balance themselves tactfully to steer clear of the rising hegemon’s ire.

Yet another feature of the current regional sub-system is the presence of an extreme trust deficit among the various actors in the region. That India and Pakistan, or China and India do not trust each other is not news, but a trust deficit exists between even seemingly congenial partners such as the U.S. and India, Russia and China, and among traditional partners such as Iran and India, and Russia and India. The varying degrees of trust deficit when combined with other factors such as unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings or the occurrence of a crisis could easily push the region towards more conflict and friction, and obviously less cooperation and regional integration.

The rising war talk in the region is yet another contemporary feature of the Southern Asian regional sub-system. The possibility of a military conflict between Iran and the U.S. (a path the hawks in Washington are pushing U.S. President Donald Trump to pursue) which in
turn would draw many more countries in the region into it leading to widespread instability, potential for India-Pakistan border skirmishes and possible escalation, an escalating China-U.S. trade war, and the many proxy and cold wars in Afghanistan and West Asia will keep the temperature high in the region for the foreseeable future.

In sum, a power transition in the Southern Asian sub-system, an extreme trust deficit and the escalating war talk pose ominous signs for the region.

The layers

This is not a pretty picture; certainly not for India, a country that is caught right in the middle of these tectonic developments and that habitually reacts to geopolitical developments with characteristic tardiness. And yet, true to its DNA, India is likely to adopt a slew of balancing acts. This is perhaps the most appropriate strategy to adopt under the circumstances provided it does so with a sense of clarity and purpose instead of merely reacting. There are at least five layers of balancing acts that India would need to adopt in order to weather the incoming geopolitical storm. At level one, it would need to balance its innate desire to get closer to the U.S. with the unavoidable necessities of not excessively provoking China both in the maritime and continental domains. Clearly, getting too close to the U.S. will provoke China, and vice versa.

The second layer of this balancing game should drive India’s West Asia policy. Here it would have to take care of its energy and other interests (including the Chabahar project) with Iran and not alienate the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel by doing so. While Iran’s share in India’s energy imports is steadily decreasing, alienating Iran might not suit India’s strategic interests in the longer run.

As a third balancing act, dealing with the Russia-China partnership will be crucial for India’s continental strategy, be it with regard to arms sales, the Afghan question or checking Chinese dominance of the region. New Delhi should be clever enough to exploit the not-so-apparent fissures between Beijing and Moscow. A related concern should be the growing relationship between Pakistan and Russia which must be dealt with by smart diplomacy rather than outrage.

Yet another layer that requires careful balancing by India is the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China. While Pakistan is the revisionist power in the region, China, being a rising superpower and an already status quoist power in the region, could potentially be persuaded to check Pakistan’s revisionist tendencies. This again requires a great deal of subtle effort from New Delhi to convince Beijing that it has great stakes in regional strategic stability. What must be noted is that both Beijing and New Delhi, despite their sharp differences and unavoidable strategic competition, share a stake in the region’s stability. Therefore even a small measure of rapprochement between them, as it seemingly exists today, could stabilise the region to a great extent.

Handling Afghanistan

Finally, if India is serious about having a say in Afghanistan’s future, it would need to enact several balancing acts there: between Russia and China, China and Pakistan, the
Taliban and Kabul, and the Taliban and Pakistan. In a constantly changing Afghan geopolitical landscape, the contents of India’s interests should also evolve.

New Delhi should keep in mind that it must, by all means, be careful to avoid getting caught in a nutcracker geopolitical situation in the region. Engaging in a delicate balancing game is undeniably the need of the hour, and let us remember that balancing such seeming contradictions is what smart diplomacy is meant to achieve.

Why South Asia must cooperate

A shared vision is essential to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals

South Asia covers only about 3.5% of the world’s land surface area but hosts a fourth of its population, making it a region of significant importance for international development. In spite of the geographic proximity countries in this region enjoy and their common socio-cultural bonds, this is one of the world’s least integrated regions. Intra-regional trade is a meagre 5% of the total trade these countries do globally, while intra-regional investment is less than 1% of the region’s overall global investment. South Asia’s average GDP per capita is only about 9.64% of the global average. Accounting for more than 30% of the world’s poor, the region faces myriad economic and environmental challenges.

Lack of initiatives

While the countries share a host of common development challenges, economic cooperation remains less than adequate. While a few noteworthy regional initiatives such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Initiative have been undertaken to bring the countries closer together, economically and socially, there is scope for much more. For a region with common development challenges of inequality, poverty, weak governance and poor infrastructure, a shared vision of attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provides enormous opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and convergence (3C).

Compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were a set of eight objectives to be achieved by developing nations with support from developed nations by 2015, the SDGs are more universal, inclusive and integrated in nature. The 17 goals and their 169 targets are inter-connected and cannot be implemented by countries working in isolation. Many are transnational in nature and require regional efforts. South Asian countries could benefit a lot by adopting a regional framework of cooperation that can support, strengthen and stimulate the SDGs. The SDGs highlight not only the importance of regional approach towards achieving the goals but also the regional synergy and resulting positive value additions towards achieving the SDG 2030 Agenda. In the SDG
Index 2018, which is an assessment of countries’ progress, among 156 countries only two South Asian countries, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, are in the top 100. India is ranked 112th.

Most South Asian countries have made good progress in ending extreme poverty, but they face persistent challenges to goals related to industry, innovation and infrastructure, zero hunger, gender equality, education, sustainable cities and communities and decent work and economic growth. These apart, most of South Asia continues to be vulnerable to climate change and climate-induced natural disasters.

Varying performances

A closer look at the country-level data shows that India is performing well in Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) while doing poorly in goal 2 (zero hunger), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). Like India, Bangladesh is doing well in Goals 1, 6, 12 and 13 but poorly in Goals 2 and 9, and lagging behind in Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy). While doing well in Goals 1 and 12, Pakistan needs improvement in Goals 2, 4, 5 and 9, similar to India and Bangladesh. It also needs improved performance with respect to Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth). There are a lot of similarities among these three big economies of South Asia with respect to achieving some specific SDGs as well as exhibiting poor performance in some common goals.

A regional strategic approach to tackle common development challenges can bring enormous benefits to South Asia. SDGs related to energy, biodiversity, infrastructure, climate resilience and capacity development are transnational, and here policy harmonisation can play a pivotal role in reducing duplication and increasing efficiency. In a study titled ‘SDGs Needs Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective’, Bangladesh has undertaken exemplary initiatives for analysing its available resources and additional funding requirements for SDG implementation, suggesting that the country requires an additional $928 billion to fully implement the SDGs. The study identifies five possible sources for SDGs financing: public sector, private sector, public-private partnership, external sector and non-government organisations. On the other hand, data for many of the SDG targets and indicators for the Maldives are unavailable. Similarly, India has formulated some pragmatic plans and initiatives to improve food and nutrition security from which many of the neighbouring countries can benefit.

To address institutional and infrastructural deficits, South Asian countries need deeper regional cooperation. On financing the SDGs in South Asia, countries can work towards increasing the flow of intra-regional FDI. The private sector too can play a vital role in resource mobilisation.

Taking everyone along

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the platform for regional economic cooperation in this region, has become moribund and remains unsuccessful in promoting regional economic cooperation. If the countries of South Asia, the fastest growing region of the world, can come to a common understanding on regional integration
and cooperation in achieving the SDGs, it can unleash a powerful synergistic force that can finally make South Asia converge. A convergence towards achieving a common socio-economic agenda gives hope that no one in South Asia will be left behind in the journey towards eradicating poverty and enduring dignity to all.

If you are getting help from Banking Chronicle, then please support BankingChronicle.co.in by Clicking 1 Ad Daily on the website.

Note: Just 1 Ad, not more than 1.

Support Us to Support YOU! :)

Your 1 Click Will Contribute 1rs To Banking Chronicle Daily
So Don’t think About 2-3 Sec