

1. Domestic Issues Hamper India's progress

Context:

- In recent decades, India has been slowly climbing up the international hierarchy, increasing its global influence en route to emerging as one of the system's premier great powers.

Asian century:

- Along with China's spectacular rise over the last four decades, India's own remarkable progress encapsulates the current global shift of economic power from Europe and North America to Asia.
- Together, these trends **herald the true beginning of the 'Asian century'**, whereby big Asian powers will gain the capability to dominate, dictate, and ultimately define the contours of international affairs.
- Despite being ascendant, India, however, often seems to be suffering from a perceptual 'gulf', whereby the country's future potential frequently appears at odds with its current reality.

Economic Powers:

- Driving India's ascent in contemporary global politics has been its burgeoning economic success. With a GDP of \$10.5 billion in 2018, **India is now the world's third largest economy after China and the US**, with many longer-term prognoses projecting it to become the second-largest within the next 20 years.

Concerns regarding to Economic Power:

- Undercutting this trajectory are major concerns regarding the existing capacity and ability of the state to fully harness the country's total economic potential.
- Currently, the **country's infrastructure is not able to sufficiently support** the energy, trade and business needs, which is affecting domestic production and impacting foreign direct investment.
- **Tax collection is very low**, with only **around 3 per cent of the population** paying any taxes at all, while job creation has not been able to keep up with the one million new people entering the workforce Each Month.

Military Power:

- India is a large and expanding military power, whose spending amounted to \$66.5 billion in 2018, placing it **fifth globally after the US, China, Saudi Arabia and Russia**.

- As the **world's largest arms importer** for virtually the last three decades, and with major arms deals and purchases pencilled in across the next decade, analysts commonly project that India will rank third militarily in the world by 2030.
- Such capabilities are enabling an ever-greater strategic reach in terms of the country's energy security and trade security needs.

Concerns Regarding Military Power:

- While these resources are expanding — India has one of the world's largest standing armies — they are mostly **used for internal security concerns to counteract separatist movements** in Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Meghalaya, and Manipur.
- Such deployments **underline the major territorial threats India faces**, with 84,000 sq. km of Arunachal Pradesh and 38,000 sq. km of **Aksai Chin** being contested by China, while Pakistan and China together maintain claims on 2,22,000 sq. km of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **These claims represent over 11 per cent of India's landmass.** Separatism, insurgency, and communal violence have resulted in the deaths of 65,500 citizens, security personnel, and terrorists/separatists between 1994 and 2015.

Demographic Potential:

- Both India's economic and military power are further amplified by factors such as the size of the population (second globally, and **set to be the biggest by 2030**) and territory (the seventh largest globally), which underscore its potential to maintain and improve its current global ranking.
- In particular, demographically, **India's population is far younger than the US's or China's (and indeed the European Union's)**, pointing to a potentially larger workforce with which to sustain its upward trajectory for decades to come, and hence, its economic and military prowess.

Concerns regarding Demography and Democracy:

- Such demographic strengths suffer, however, from **underdeveloped resources** with which to fully harness their potential, **with education and health** provisions too weak to fully enable the prospective gains of such a large and youthful population.
- In the longer term, India will also need enhanced housing and pensions system to cater for its elderly population.

Although India is the world's largest democracy (with an electorate of 900 million in 2019), the state **does not appropriately defend minority, caste, and women's rights, and has under-functioning institutions undercut by human rights abuses, corruption, and a reduced adherence** to secularism.

Soft Power:

- Beyond the material realm, India also possesses **enviable major soft power repositories in the form of Bollywood, cuisine, cricket, and its claims as the birthplace of yoga (to name but a few)**. As an increasingly recognised global brand, this again places the country in the upper echelons of world power that is potentially akin in the longer run to the US and China.

Roadblocks in Progress:

- Economically, the country is not yet a major pivot upon which the world relies, currently ranking as only the **world's 19th largest exporter and 11th highest importer**.
- Militarily, not with standing its high contributions to UN peacekeeping operations (usually the world's third or fourth highest), **it lacks the ability or volition to project this power in the interests of international security** and is hamstrung by domestic security concerns.
- It is also outweighing the strong domestic – and evermore nationalist-fuelled – belief that India is a country of great power standing. **Not having a permanent veto seat on the UN Security Council appears** to be the best example in this regard, whereby India's latent strength is not yet formally consecrated by others.

Conclusion:

- Regardless, as India's largely benign rise continues, perhaps greater domestic patience and international accommodation are needed to better appreciate the challenges and issues that will mark it out as a 21st century great power.
- Such political space and accommodation will be to both India's and the wider system's advantage.