

**1. India's labour laws have been the most politically stubborn areas to reform, standing in the way of China-style industrial acceleration. Comment.**

**Demand of the question:**

It expects students to write about need of labour reforms in industrial acceleration of India along with the critical assessment of current affairs about labour reforms and capacity of labour reforms to expedite industrial acceleration.

**Introduction:**

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has informed trade unions of India that its Director-General has expressed concern and urged Prime Minister of India to 'send a clear message' to the Central and State governments to uphold international labour laws after the recent dilution of laws by some States. Government of India caught between attracting foreign investors relocating from India and concerns over exploitation of lower strata of population due to forced closure due to Covid-19.

**Body:**

The reforms of 1991, a major milestone that they are in India's post-Independence history, primarily focused on the demand side of the economy. But government continued to exercise major control over land, labour and material resources, and nowhere was it more throttling as in the laws and policies governing labour.

Need of labour reforms:

- The sheer complexity of India's labour law regime, which comprises more than 150 legislations with conflicting provisions in different statutes and archaic obligations flowing from them, was unfathomable.
- Full compliance was virtually impossible. No other major economy had such a legal regime in place, all in the name of protecting weaker sections of the working force. It was these laws that made India miss the 'manufacturing bus' of the 1980s.
- The continued presence of restrictive labour laws, however, continues to make India an unfavourable destination for manufacturing as compared to Southeast Asian economies like Vietnam.
- Labour being concurrent subject, variation of labour laws and rules in different states increase complexity for foreign players looking towards nationwide consistency.

However, not all changes in the labour laws are reformist; free hands to employers in such pandemic situation might increase the vulnerability of labour class to disease, hunger and poverty.

China-style industrial acceleration:

- China being authoritarian country used its cheap labour to attract investments in the 1980s and 1990s, while India only talked about labour reforms since 1994 and failed to bring consolidation even today.

- China style industrial acceleration was majorly based on the export led growth model. In today's changed world of protectionism mere imitation of china may not be useful.
- As per the World Bank survey, 2014, employers did not rate labour law regulations as the top five or seven or 10 irritants in India.
- There is limited evidence that relaxing labour laws alone will increase employment. It has been argued that though labour reforms have been tried across some States and also in Special Economic Zones, but this has not resulted in a significant rise in employment.
- Contrary to the popular narrative, while India rates 58th out of 140 countries in the WEF's Global Competitiveness Index, it ranks 33rd on the flexibility of labour markets. In comparison, China ranks 62nd on labour markets, though it is 28th overall. Clearly, lack of competitive labour markets is not the main factor driving India's poor competitiveness and there is little evidence that relaxing labour laws alone will attract overseas investment, especially from the companies that are looking to leave China.

**Conclusion:**

There is need to complete the process of creating a comprehensive integrated legal framework for labour, light on compliance and administrative requirements but ensuring protection of worker rights, that had already been initiated by the present government.

**2. The toxic gas leak in Visakhapatnam that killed 11 people and made hundreds ill shows lessons haven't been learned from the 1984 Bhopal tragedy. In this light, suggest a blueprint for preventing such disasters in the future.**

**Demand of the question:**

It expects students to write about similarities between Bhopal gas tragedy and recent gas leak in Vishakhapatnam and reasons behind inability to arrest such incidents. Students should also write suggestions to avoid such incidents in future.

**Introduction:**

LG Polymers has claimed that styrene gas began leaking around 2.30 am from a storage tank containing 1,800 tonnes of the volatile compound. The gas spread through five densely populated villages, killing people and cattle, including buffaloes, dogs and even birds.

**Body:**

According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), in the recent past, over 130 significant chemical accidents have been reported in the country,

which have resulted in 259 deaths and caused major injuries to more than 560 people.

Lessons not learnt:

- Like in Bhopal gas tragedy, there was no warning from the factory.
- The Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989, stipulate exacting conditions for storage of chemicals like styrene. LG Polymers claims that the source of the leak is its storage tank, and that prolonged disuse had created conditions that led to the disastrous leak. Even in Bhopal, the magnitude of the disaster was a direct result of storing large quantities of a volatile toxin in a densely populated location
- LG Polymers is no stranger to controversy. In 2000, a reactor blast shook the surrounding villages and fuelled their anxiety. People ran away, and no lives were lost. In 2017, after repeated complaints to the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board failed to provoke any reaction.
- In another similarity with Bhopal, LG Polymers too handed over critical operations to untrained casual workers.
- Background concentration of styrene in urban air is between 0.06 and 4.6 parts per billion. Styrene toxicity has been recorded mainly among workers and not the general population. The levels required to kill adults and buffaloes outside the fence-line is bound to be incredibly high.

Steps taken by government to prevent chemical accidents:

- Bhopal Gas Leak (Processing of Claims) Act, 1985, which gives powers to the central government to secure the claims arising out of or connected with the Bhopal gas tragedy. Under the provisions of this Act, such claims are dealt with speedily and equitably.
- The Environment Protection Act, 1986, which gives powers to the central government to undertake measures for improving the environment and set standards and inspect industrial units.
- The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, which is insurance meant to provide relief to persons affected by accidents that occur while handling hazardous substances.
- The National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997, under which the National Environment Appellate Authority can hear appeals regarding the restriction of areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- National Green Tribunal, 2010, provides for the establishment of a National Green Tribunal for effective and expeditious disposal of cases related to environmental protection and conservation of forests.

Blueprint to avoid such incidents:

- Ease of doing business should be balanced with environmental sensitivities: The government wants to give fast-track clearances to companies without

gauging environmental impact of their projects properly to improve ease of doing business however environmental cost and threat to human life could be disproportionate. Therefore, environmental sensitivity should be given utmost priority in clearance of chemical plants.

- Strict enforcement of laws: No permission for chemical plant around densely populated areas. Recurrent audit by pollution control bodies and regulators about the fulfilment of required standards and strict actions if not adhered to guidelines.
- Responsibility fixation: Erring company officials often go unpunished in the name of unavoidable scenario. Responsibility fixation could help to zero down negligence and avoid such tragedies in future.
- Improved Monitoring at industry level: A fixed gas leakage detection system should be in place at strategic points throughout the facility. Portable gas leak detectors should also be used to detect leaks remotely and notify the facility to ensure quick and safe evacuation. More effective methods of prevention are to gather data from previous leaks and turn that into practical information to implement new safety procedures.
- Keeping Detailed Records: When leaks do happen, it's important to keep detailed data relating to the size and location of the leak. By understanding the scale of the problem, industries will be prepared to tackle any new issues that might spring up. The details of records will allow fixing infrastructure problems internally and making improvements to current safety procedures, doing so in a faster and more permanent fashion.
- Safety and Preparedness Goals: Need to keep employees well-versed in what they should do in the event of a leak.
- Early warning system: Use of technology to circulate early warning messages, siren or with other innovative means to surrounding areas could reduce the death toll in unavoidable accidents.

### **Conclusion:**

Government should set an example by dealing the situation in strict manner rather than undermining severity. It is a grim wake up call for the chemical industry to acknowledge and fulfil its responsibility to respect human rights.

### **3. What do you understand by 'cultural diplomacy'? What dividends can India reap through sound cultural diplomacy? Examine.**

#### **Demand of the question:**

It expects students to write about the concept of 'cultural diplomacy' and potential of cultural diplomacy in national interest along with the limitations of it as diplomatic tool in international relations.

#### **Introduction:**

Cultural diplomacy is an important dimension of a country's soft power. The international impact of India's soft power was felt long before the term found place in popular parlance in the 21st century. Indian arts, culture and spiritualism have attracted people from all around the world for centuries.

### Body:

Cultural diplomacy:

- Cultural diplomacy is an important instrument in regional and international cooperation and is of particular relevance in our region i.e. South Asia. Culture and cultural diplomacy have emerged as the force to connect, to build bilateral relations and to heal the raptures created by history and politics.
- The five pillars of cultural diplomacy, used in a strategic sense are Samman (dignity), Samvaad (dialogue), Samriddhi (shared prosperity), Suruksha (regional and global security), and Sanskriti evam Sabhayata (Cultural and civilizational links). These are interlinked with India's broader political and economic goals.
- It is internationally recognised that one of India's significant global contribution's like, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' was among the first precursors of Global Citizenship as it is understood today – the concept that all individuals are collectively responsible towards each other and their shared future.
- India's soft power as represented through her vibrant cultural and civilizational heritage and through her Diaspora spread worldwide, serves as a powerful reminder that India's values of secularism, tolerance, inclusiveness and cross fertilisation of cultures which are an intrinsic part of our civilisation, are more relevant than ever before in the uncertain international scenario of today.
- The internet, the social networking sites, our television channels, Indian movies, especially Indian film industry and visits by acclaimed musical and cultural troupes and theatre groups have contributed to the cultural connectivity across borders.
- Cultural bonding can be one of the ways to prevent conflict and promote peace.

Potential of cultural diplomacy:

- Recognition of Indian ancient knowledge at world stage: One of its important manifestations in today's world is the UN General Assembly recognised 21st June as International Day of Yoga. Indian classical dance in various forms which enjoy a high degree of world-wide acclaim and appreciation.
- Confidence Building Measure: The joint commemoration by India and Bangladesh of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary and Nazrul's 100th birth anniversary. It is unique that both the Indian and Bangladeshi national anthem has been composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

- Shared History and posture of humility: Cultural charm and use of humility often help win hearts of common people of international community.
- Regional integration: India has revived the old Buddhism tourism circuit to link up with Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and other States in our wider neighbourhood which had Buddha's footprints. Thus, India's culture and soft power are an example of how both help States to overcome years of mutual mistrust and push forward the process of regional integration.
- Tourism being economic driver: Another example is the 'Ramayana Circuit'. PM Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart jointly inaugurated direct bus service between Janakpur (Nepal) and Ayodhya (India).
- Cultural diplomacy during Covid-19 times: 'Namaskar' and 'vanakkam' have come into sudden fashion in times of physical distancing, while fighting this epidemic. It is an old civilizational greeting from India, which means that I, as an individual, salute the sacred and the divine in you. Gesture of just retired India's permanent representative to UN to bid adieu his formal commitments with 'Namaste' was excellent example of cultural diplomacy.
- People to people contact: The diaspora too is an integral part of the country's soft-power story. Indiaspora, a group of Indian entrepreneurs in the US, has donated close to US\$ 800,000 (and counting) for food security programmes in both India and the United States, which was part of a campaign titled, 'Chalo Give for Covid-19'. As part of the initiative, they have also successfully fed close to six million people in both countries thus far.

India dreams of becoming 'vishwaguru'- global teacher in every aspect of human life. However, hard politics at home may undo the efforts of cultural diplomacy at international level.

- Unfortunately cultural diplomacy is still regarded to be at a lower level in most Foreign Offices than traditional diplomacy which is based on a country's hard power depending on its strategic and military options.
- Concerns of Sovereignty undermine initiatives of cultural diplomacy: Nepal's recent cartographic assertion is an example of limitations of cultural diplomacy. Blockade of 2015 on Indo-Nepal boundary also seen by Nepalese as India's hard power tactic which significantly reduced the popularity and goodwill of India among Nepalese populations.
- Political statements stigmatising Bangladeshi people as illegal migrants in India during CAA-NRC debate proved counterproductive to the India-Bangladesh bonhomie at government level. Domestic political issues may limit influence gathered over long time.
- Shared history might bring back the uneasy historic facts which might unnecessarily create bone of contention.

Even with saying of "speak softly and carry a big stick: you will go far", hard power becomes inevitable as last resort in diplomatic efforts. Cultural diplomacy cannot rely on soft power and symbolism only.

### Conclusion:

India needs to disseminate soft power through the institutions of cultural diplomacy of our country so that we can build bridges across borders and across continents for greater international understanding, peace and harmony.

