Digital India Programme

Topic- Government Policies and Interventions [GS Paper-2]

Context- The Digital India Programme has made India digitally empowered in the area of technology.

Key Highlights

Vision:

- Government has launched the Digital India programme with the vision of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge-based economy, by ensuring
    - digital access,
    - digital inclusion,
    - digital empowerment and
    - bridging the digital divide.
- The programme is centred on three key vision areas such as
    - Digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen,
    - Governance and services on demand, and
    - Digital empowerment of citizens.

Goal:

- The overall aim is to ensure that
    - Digital technologies improve the life of each citizen,
    - Expand the country's digital economy,

- Create investment and employment opportunities and
- Create digital technological capabilities in India.

Outcomes of the programme:

- Digital India has considerably reduced the distance between the Government and citizens of the country.
- It has helped in the delivery of substantial services directly to the beneficiary in a transparent and corruption-free manner.
- In the process, India has emerged as one of the pre-eminent countries of the world to use technology to transform the lives of its citizens.

Key initiatives undertaken by MeitY under the Digital India programme:

- **Aadhaar**:
    - Aadhaar provides 12 digits biometric and demographic-based identity which is unique, lifelong, online and authenticable.
    - It has given statutory backing through The Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016.
    - More than 135.5 crore residents have been enrolled.

- **Common Services Centres:**
    - These centres are offering government and business services in digital mode in rural areas through Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs).
    - More than 400 digital services are being offered by these CSCs.
    - Till now, 5.21 Lakh CSCs are functional (including urban & rural areas) across the country.
    - **DigiLocker**:
        - Digital Locker provides an ecosystem with the collection of repositories and gateways for issuers to upload their documents in the digital repositories.
        - Digital Locker has over 13.7 crore users and more than 562 crore documents.

- **Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance (UMANG):**
    - UMANG App provides government services to citizens through mobile. Over 1668 e-Services and over 20,197 bill payment services are made available at UMANG.
    - **e-Sign**:
        - e-Sign service facilitates instant signing of forms or documents online by citizens in a legally acceptable form.
    - **MyGov**:
        - It is a citizen engagement platform which is developed to facilitate participatory governance. Currently, more than 2.76+ crore users are registered with MyGov.
    - **MeriPehchaan**:
        - National Single Sign-on (NSSO) platform also called MeriPehchaan has been

launched in July 2022 to facilitate or provide citizens ease of access to government portals.

- **Jeevan Pramaan**:
  - Jeevan Pramaan envisages digitizing the whole process of securing the life certificate for the pensioners.
- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA)**:
  - The Government has approved the PMGDISHA scheme to usher in digital literacy in rural India.

- **Unified Payment Interface (UPI):**

  - UPI is the leading digital payment platform. It has boarded 376 banks and has also facilitated 730 crore transactions (by volume) worth Rs 11.9 lakh crore.

Significance of the Digital India campaign

- **Reducing corruption:**

    - The campaign has helped save Rs 2.25 lakh crore from falling into the wrong hands in the past eight years.
  - **Eliminating middle-men**:
    - Digital India has also saved money for the common man by ending the network of middle-men
  - **Transparency**:
    - The transparency which has come due to Digital India has eliminated corruption at various levels adversely affecting the poor and the middle class.

- **Direct Benefit Transfer:**

    - In the last eight years, over Rs 23 lakh crore has been transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to beneficiaries.

- **The trio of Jan Dhan, Mobile and Aadhaar, or JAM:**

    - The trio has provided maximum benefit to the poor and the middle class.

- **Finding missing children:**

    - Digital India has also helped missing children reconnect with their parents.

- **Digital India helped the government tackle the crisis arising out of the Covid pandemic:**

  - CoWin and Aarogya Setu are two mobile applications which helped provide 200 crore vaccine doses.
- **Ending digital divide:**
  - Digital India has helped bridge the digital divide that exists between rural and urban India.

Challenges

- **Gender gap:**

    - Women of the country are 15 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone and 33 per cent less likely to use mobile internet services than men.
    - Women constitute only one-third of internet users in the country.
    - **Skewed penetration**:
        - Among all the states of India, Maharashtra has the highest internet penetration, followed by Goa and Kerala, while Bihar has the lowest, followed by Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

- **India's global rank:**

    - According to the UN's e-participation index (2022), that is a composite measure of three important dimensions of e-government, namely provision of online services, telecommunication connectivity and human capacity, India ranks 105 out of 193 nations.
    - **Online safety**:
        - As per a survey, more than half of young women have experienced violence online, including sexual harassment, threatening messages and having private images shared without consent.
        - Particularly women's rights defenders and female journalists were targeted for abuse more than most.

- **Inadequate artificial intelligence:**

    - The third threat comes from inadequate designed artificial intelligence systems that repeat and exacerbate discrimination.

Way Forward

- **Creation of an entity:**

    - An empowered entity should be set up which is accountable for quality and timeliness to design and construct digital highways, and their rural branches, and ensure their optimum utilisation by sharing the infrastructure.
    - **Skills**:
        - Digital skills, required today both for life and for livelihoods, should be imparted on a war footing by transforming government digital literacy programmes into skilling missions, and expanding outreach, including through the private sector.

- **Online safety of women:**

    - Social media sites can use their "algorithm power" in order to proactively tackle the issue of safety.
    - Also the Government needs to strengthen laws that hold online abusers to account, and the public to speak up whenever they witness abuse online.