



Mains Practice Question

Q. “India’s distinct economic and demographic position allows it to shape, influence and constrain global technology rules that serve its strategic interests”. Discuss the statement in the wake of the ban of Chinese apps. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce by briefly writing India's economic and demographic position in the world.
- Discuss how India can influence the global technology rules to serve its strategic interests.
- Mention some of the issues with India's own technology rules and cyber space.
- Give a way forward to conclude.

Introduction

- India is an emerging economy and was ranked **5th largest economy** in the world in 2019, according to the IMF.
- Due to its strong economy and demography position, India ranks **3rd in terms of the highest number of internet users** in the world after USA and China, the number has grown 6-fold between 2012-2017 with a compound annual growth rate of 44%.

Body

Recently, the Government of India has banned 59 apps with Chinese links. The order was taken under section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 read with the Blocking Rules, 2009.

India’s distinct economic and demographic position only furthers its chances of exploiting this opportunity and the same can be seen from the following:

- India has 62.5% of its population in the age group of 15-59 years which is ever increasing and will be at the peak around 2036 when it will reach approximately 65%. These population parameters indicate an availability of demographic dividend in India, which started in 2005-06 and will last till 2055-56.
- In India campaigns like Make in India and Digital India has elevated the economic ecosystem of India. India’s now relatively strong intellectual property regime will facilitate its emergence as a major R&D centre.
- India is now the third largest country in terms of the number of start-ups. Therefore, the ban has only created a supply imbalance in the market which will attract Indian startups to fill the void.
- Also India has always been an IT superpower which lately has come under severe strain due to fierce competition from Chinese and US companies. This is an opportunity to gain back the lost glory.
- This move also has strategic connotations. Massive use of these apps in India carries long term economic benefits for China in terms of valuation, marketing, and research and development.
 - But, more to the point, it creates a treasure trove of data on Indian citizens which could have been misused by the Chinese government and its agents at times of adversity.

- Countries such as Australia, United States, and France have come out in support of India post the ban. India can sufficiently exercise its diplomatic clout by negotiating with its Western allies and gaining a strong position against China by acting as a rule-shaper to preserve the civil, political and economic rights of its citizens.

Issues with India's Technology rules

- Lack of uniformity in devices used for internet access as most of the devices are imported from other countries esp China. Such devices also pose security threats.
- Lack of national level architecture for Cybersecurity- There is no national security architecture that unifies the efforts of public and private agencies to be able to assess the nature of any threat and tackle them effectively.
- As there is no National regulatory policy in place for cybersecurity there is a lack of awareness at both company level as well as individual level.

Conclusion

India's decision to ban Chinese apps seems to be an effective way to impose costs on China for its actions at the border and inhibit its ability to exert influence and access information inside the country. India must cash in this opportunity locally as well as globally by engaging more confidently in global technology governance debates and shape incumbent rules and norms.

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