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The Concept of BIMARU States

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Why in News: On February 10, on the inaugural day of the Uttar Pradesh government's two-day Investors' Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled the tag of 'BIMARU', used to describe the state. He again used the term in Rajasthan two days later, at the inauguration of the New Delhi-Mumbai expressway's first phase.

A Brief about BIMARU States

"BIMARU" was more of an informal term rather than an administrative category, which also came to synonymously denote this group of states that lagged behind in overall human development

The BIMARU acronym has often been used in the past few decades to refer to the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, usually to imply they have lagged in terms of economic growth, healthcare, education, and more. BIMARU means "sickly" in Hindi.

Ashish Bose, the late demographer (someone who studies a population and changes within it), coined this term in a paper presented to then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. At this point in time, the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand were not separate states and were part of the grouping.

Bose mainly argued that from a family planning and population control perspective, these four states with their high population growth rates were likely to offset the gains made elsewhere in the country.

The national goal of reaching a "stabilising population", meaning where the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.1 was achieved, was more difficult to achieve, therefore. TFR estimates the number of children each woman bears in her lifetime, on average.

The good progress in family planning in the southern states cannot compensate for the slow progress of family planning in the northern states in bringing about population stabilisation. This will considerably delay the target date for population stabilisation

Role of BIMARU states in population growth

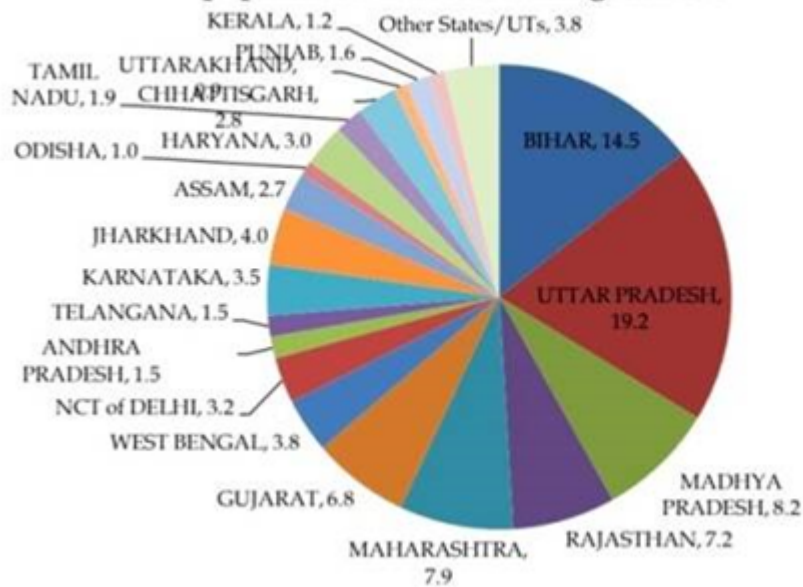
Erstwhile BIMARU states, which accounted for 41 per cent of India's total population in 2001, will account for 43.5 per cent in 2026. This has tremendous political implications.

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Figure 4- Percentage Share of States in total projected population increase during 2011-36



It also shows that the share of BIMARU states in the absolute increase in India's population during 2001-26 will be of the order of 50.4 per cent while the share of the south will be only 12.6 per cent

A 2020 report of the National Commission on Population of the Union Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, titled 'Report of the Technical Group on Population Projection', said BIMARU states (excluding the three newly carved out states) will contribute to 49.1% of the population increase in India between 2011 and 2036.

Population in Indian states also dictates the delimitation process or the number of seats allotted to them in Parliament. Currently, the seats are proportional to the Indian population as of the 1971 census. It was frozen until 2001 (and has now further been extended to 2026) to give states time to meet family planning goals.

Bose also pointed to how these states fare poorly in terms of indicators like women's literacy, lower institutional childbirths (in a medical institution), etc.

However, there was a dip of 4 per cent in the population growth rate of these states — from 24.99 per cent in 1991-2001 to 20.92 per cent in 2001-11 — and it helped pulled down the country's decadal growth rate.

Backwardness of BIMARU in other indicators

On per capita income, while the poorer states led by Bihar have grown faster year on year than richer states, the gulf between them remains wider than ever. In 1980-81, the average per capita income of the four states was 74% of the all-India figure, but in 2010-11 it declined to 59% of it

As of 2014-15, the richest among the BIMARU states was Rajasthan, with a per capita income of Rs 65,974, but this was still less than half that of richer states like Haryana.

In 2013, a committee constituted under the Ministry of Finance, developed an index of backwardness to compare states with ten sub-components including per capita expenditure, the poverty rate and urbanisation rate. On that ranking, Odisha ranked the lowest followed by Bihar and Madhya Pradesh at joint second from last. Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh were also tied at the same rank.

The literacy rates in these states according to the 2011 census are Bihar 63.8%, Rajasthan 67.1%, Jharkhand 67.6%, Madhya Pradesh 70.6% and Uttar Pradesh 71.7% against a national average of 74.04%. While they trail the national average in the current literacy rate, they are registering very healthy growth rates in literacy comfortably

outpacing states like Andhra Pradesh (67.7%) and Chhattisgarh (71%), which have comparable literacy levels (the exception being Rajasthan).

The life expectancy in BIMARU states is lower than in other Indian states. In fact, it is lower than the average life expectancy of India as a whole, implying that these states bring down the overall average as a whole

As per Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index of 2018, all of the poorest 50 districts in the country are in the erstwhile BIMARU states—Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh—and 91 of the poorest 100 are concentrated in these seven states.

Use of BIMARU States over the years

The BIMARU tag has been used to criticise the parties in power in these states, and also to showcase success in achieving some progress.

In 2012, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh remarked, “States that used to grow slowly in earlier periods have done much better. The average growth rate of the five poorest states exceeds the national average for the first time in any Plan period

There have also been studies on whether the categorisation continues to apply. According to a 2015 IIM Ahmedabad study on medical facilities in these states, it was noticed there were gaps.

“All these states including Bihar (17.83), MP (7.53) and UP (3.91), except Rajasthan (61.19) are below the national average (20.74) in terms of total and rural government hospitals per million people,” it said

NITI Aayog’s 2019-20 Health Index Round IV also ranked Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (in highest to lowest order) at the last four positions out of 19 large states.

At times Odisha is also included in the grouping, as BIMAROU, although it is not as big a state in terms of population. An Empowered Action Group (EAG) was set up to include these five states in 2001.

Measures for improvement

The Indian government decided to pay focused attention to these states, particularly in the highly neglected area of reproductive health. Around the same time, the five states were reorganised and became eight in number with the hope that being smaller would help them respond better to the process of development.

They were rechristened the Empowered Action Group (EAG), and the pejorative title BIMARU was wiped out of the official vocabulary

In 2005, the National Rural Health Mission, India’s largest-ever health programme, started pumping resources into these “high-focus states.” Strategies included revamping rural health infrastructure, promoting health centre-based deliveries, facilitating access to emergency obstetric care, and assigning a trained health activist to make family-level contact, undertake pregnancy tracking and provide access to contraceptives.

The Way ahead

The BIMARU states in recent years stated showing some positive trends in various socio economic indicator. The focused efforts with regular monitoring is still need of the hour to bridge the gap.