

**NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC****Initiatives on women's safety conceptualized by the WCD Ministry**

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has launched three important initiatives on women's safety. They are: Panic button, SCIM portal under Safe City Project and DNA Analysis Facilities in States.

Panic button: Conceived way back in 2015, mobile phone manufacturers and mobile telephony service providers were mandated by the Ministry of Telecom to include a physical panic button on all mobile phones in the country. Such a panic button must be backed by an emergency response mechanism through the local police when panic button message would alert the specified family members etc. of a woman in distress situation. The emergency response system can be triggered in the following manners:

- On the smart phones, the power button when pressed three times quickly.
- Dialing 112 from any phone.
- In case of feature phones, long press of the touch key 5 or 9.
- Using 112 India Mobile App.
- The emergency message coming out of the above modes, will trigger a response from the emergency response centre through a team of trained personnel who can handle emergency requests of various kinds and get the necessary relief services launched.

SCIM portal under Safe City Project: Being implemented in 8 cities, the project includes creation of ground assets & resources and mindset safety of women. Some of the key features of the safe city project include:

- Identification of sensitive hot spots in each city.
- Installation of CCTV surveillance covering the entire hot spot.
- Automated number plate reading machines to be deployed in extremely sensitive areas.
- Intensive patrolling in vulnerable areas beyond the identified hot spots.
- Improving street lighting and public toilet facilities for women.

Others like setting up women help desks in police stations, augmentation of women support centres etc. All the above measures would be coordinated through an Integrated Smart Control Room in the city. In order to facilitate States to monitor and manage the Safe City projects and avoid duplication on ground, an online Safe City Implementation Monitoring (SCIM) portal has been developed by MHA. SCIM will facilitate online tracking of deployment of assets and infrastructure created under the Safe City projects. SCIM facilitates an evidence based online monitoring system. SCIM also creates a digital repository of assets, infrastructure and social outreach programs, as well as best practices achieved in each City.

DNA Analysis Facilities in States: In view of the complaints of delay in cases of sexual assault investigations, it was proposed that dedicated DNA analysis facilities should be created in the forensic science laboratories on a mission mode. Timely testing of DNA samples from the crime scene is the quickest process of obtaining forensic evidence in cases of sexual assault on women. In the initial phase, dedicated DNA analysis facilities have been sanctioned for the forensic science laboratories located at Chennai, Madurai, Agra, Lucknow, Mumbai and Kolkata.

**CONSTITUTION AND POLITY****Not without an explanation: when judges recuse themselves**

Recently 3 Judges Recused themselves from hearing the case challenging the appointment of M. Nageswara Rao as interim director of the Central Bureau of Investigation.

**Previous cases of recusals**

- Justice U.U. Lalit recused himself from hearing the dispute over land in Ayodhya after senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan pointed out that the judge had appeared for former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh in a related contest.
- Two judges of the Gujarat High Court withdrew from a set of controversial cases by merely saying, "not before me."

**Problem with such recusals**

- None of the judges recorded their reasons in writing, allowing, in the process, plenty of scope for conjecture and surmise.

- Not having a written order specifically justifying the recusal, it's difficult to tell whether the disqualification was really required.
- An unwarranted recusal, much like a failure to recuse when faced with genuine conflicts of interest, damage the rule of law.
- To withdraw from a case merely because a party suggests that a judge does so impair judicial fairness.
- It allows parties to cherry-pick a bench of their choice.

**Obligations of Judiciary:** In taking the oath of office, judges, both of the Supreme Court and of the high courts, promise to perform their duties, to deliver justice, "without fear or favor, affection or ill-will".

#### Formulating Rules

- There are no definite rules on recusals by Judges.
- Justice J. Chelameswar in his opinion in Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (2015) held that "Where a judge has a pecuniary interest, no further inquiry as to whether there was a 'real danger' or 'reasonable suspicion' of bias is required to be undertaken,"
- "But in other cases, such an inquiry is required, and the relevant test is the 'real danger' test."
- The test does provide a plausible solution, so long as judges make their choices by reducing their reasons to writing.
- For when judges choose without a rational motive, without expressing their decisions in writing, they hurt the very idea of judicial rectitude.

#### Way Forward

- Ultimately, a mistaken case of recusal can prove just as destructive to rule of law as those cases where a judge refuses a recusal despite the existence of bias.
- Recusals to be used as a tool to manoeuvre justice, as a means to picking benches of a party's choice, and as an instrument to evade judicial work.
- As the Constitutional Court of South Africa held, in 1999, "the nature of the judicial function involves the performance of difficult and at times unpleasant tasks," and to that end, judicial officers "must resist all manner of pressure, regardless of where it comes from.
- This is the constitutional duty common to all judicial officers. If they deviate, the independence of the judiciary would be undermined, and in turn, the Constitution itself."

### **GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.**

#### **Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill**

In a first for India, Rajasthan government has prepared the draft of Rajasthan Social Accountability Bill and has invited suggestions from the general public.

#### **Objectives of the Bill:**

- To seek the accountability of public functionaries and authorities for timely delivery of goods and services.
- To create democratic, decentralized and participative approach to enable wider public participation.
- To Initiate monitoring of programmes and policies through community score cards, citizens report card and social audits.

#### **Key provisions:**

- The purview of bill includes any entity or body, which is under the control of the government, governor and the high court of Rajasthan. Entity or the body set up by Central Government to function within the State of Rajasthan and partially or wholly providing public goods and services provided there is consent of the Central Government.
- It seeks to impose penalties and compensation and initiate departmental action against the Grievance Redressal Officer (GRO) of the service delivery department for non-compliance. For example: If the local police have failed to deliver it duties, the onus is on the GRO.
- The Bill will also set up a grievance redressal mechanism starting from village panchayats. The Bill included provisions for citizens' charter, public hearing, social audit and information and facilitation centres.

Significance of this law: This law will compliment RTI which is becoming far more challenging. The citizen centric law will enable citizens to initiate enquiries rather than relying on the departmental enquires in the existing system.

Social accountability: "Social accountability" refers to actions initiated by citizen groups to hold public officials, politicians, and service providers to account for their conduct and performance in terms of delivering services, improving people's welfare and protecting people's rights. There are four pillars of social accountability such as (1) organized and capable citizens groups; (2) an enabling environment, with government champions who are willing to engage; (3) cultural appropriateness; and, (4) access to information.

## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**

### **International Vision Zero Conference**

'International Vision Zero Conference' to Promote Occupational Safety and Health is being held in Mumbai. The conference provides a forum for promoting safety and health at work by exchanging knowledge, practices and experience. It has been organized by Directorate General Factory Advice and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI), Ministry of Labour and Employment, German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV), Germany in association with Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay and International Social Security Association – Manufacturing, Construction and Mining.

'Vision Zero' concept: The concept of Vision Zero is based on four fundamental principles viz. life is non-negotiable, humans are fallible, tolerable limits are defined by human physical resistance, and people are entitled to safe transport and safe workplaces. The Vision is based on principles of Controlling Risks, Ensuring Safety and Health in Machines, Equipment and Workplaces and Skill Upgradation of Workforce.

### **Argentina in International Solar Alliance**

Argentina has signed the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance. It became the 72nd country to sign the Framework Agreement of the International Solar Alliance.

#### **ISA:**

- The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar energy among its member countries.
- Objectives: The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- What it does? As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.
- When it entered into force? When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization, headquartered at Gurugram, India.

## **INDIAN ECONOMY**

### **Interim bailout: RBI surplus to govt.**

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India decided to transfer an interim surplus of Rs. 28,000 crore to the Centre.

#### **Background:**

- Together with the Rs. 40,000-crore final surplus share for 2017-18, which the Centre received in the first half, the total receipts from the RBI this fiscal will be a tidy Rs. 68,000 crore.
- Government strapped for finances and struggling to meet the revised fiscal deficit target of 3.4% of GDP, the RBI's largesse will be handy.
- The total surplus received by the Centre for 2018-19 is substantially higher than the Rs. 50,000 crore it got from the RBI in 2017-18, and this is the second successive year the central bank is making an interim transfer: last year it transferred Rs.10,000 crore.

**Concerns With Such an Arrangement**

- Though there is nothing wrong in a shareholder demanding an interim dividend payout, the fact is that the Centre is advancing a receipt from the next fiscal to bail itself out in the current one.
- Should the RBI decide not to repeat this practice, the government's revenues will suffer because as much as Rs.82,911 crore has been budgeted on this count for the next fiscal.
- Again, the central bank is not like a corporate enterprise, nor can the government compare itself with a company shareholder.
- The RBI's income and surplus growth cannot be measured in commercial terms since a large part of it comes from statutory functions it has to perform as a regulator.

**Recent Changes in Surplus Transfers and dividend receipts**

- The large payout this fiscal is bound to raise eyebrows, especially because of the recent history of conflict between the RBI and the Centre over the sharing of the former's accumulated reserves as a dividend with the Centre.
- Though the practice of an interim payout started under Mr. Patel, there are inevitable questions over whether there was pressure from the Centre now for the transfer of a higher sum than last year.
- Centre had in the Interim Budget bumped up receipts under this head from the central bank, nationalised banks and other financial institutions to Rs.74,140 crore from the original estimate of Rs.54,817 crore made in the 2018-19 Budget.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE ETC****Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells (iPSC)**

Japan approves stem cells trial to treat spinal cord injuries. A team of Japanese researchers will carry out an unprecedented trial using human-induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS) to treat spinal cord injuries.

**Induced pluripotent stem cells:**

- Induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) are adult cells that have been genetically reprogrammed to an embryonic stem cell-like state by being forced to express genes and factors important for maintaining the defining properties of embryonic stem cells.
- Although additional research is needed, iPSCs are already useful tools for drug development and modeling of diseases, and scientists hope to use them in transplantation medicine.

**Stem cells:** Stem cells have the remarkable potential to develop into many different cell types in the body during early life and growth. In addition, in many tissues they serve as a sort of internal repair system, dividing essentially without limit to replenish other cells as long as the person or animal is still alive. When a stem cell divides, each new cell has the potential either to remain a stem cell or become another type of cell with a more specialized function, such as a muscle cell, a red blood cell, or a brain cell. Stem cells are distinguished from other cell types by two important characteristics:

- First, they are unspecialized cells capable of renewing themselves through cell division, sometimes after long periods of inactivity.
- Second, under certain physiologic or experimental conditions, they can be induced to become tissue- or organ-specific cells with special functions. In some organs, such as the gut and bone marrow, stem cells regularly divide to repair and replace worn out or damaged tissues. In other organs, however, such as the pancreas and the heart, stem cells only divide under special conditions.

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**Set a goal that makes you want to jump out of bed every morning.**