

**NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION,  
EMPOWERMENT ETC****A manifesto for health**

Health is making an impact on the political scene, when on the one hand, Prime Minister launches the Ayushman Bharat scheme a year before the elections and on the other hand, the Congress's manifesto carries the party's pledge to enact a Right to Healthcare Act.

**Current health scenario in the country**

- Stagnated spending – In the past five years, the Union health budget has stagnated in real terms, allocations to the National Health Mission do not cover inflation and there have been avoidable deaths of scores of children in public hospitals in Gorakhpur and other places that can be ascribed to the lack of material and human resources.
- Failure in regulation – Governments have failed to regulate private hospitals effectively, leading to numerous instances of mismanagement and massive over-charging of patients, such as the tragic case of Adya Singh in Fortis hospital, Gurgaon.
- Underfunding of the schemes – There are convincing facts which show that the “solution” being offered in the form of the PradhanMantri Jan AarogyaYojna is not only seriously underfunded (current funds being less than one-fourth of required) but it will only scratch the tip of the iceberg of healthcare requirements in India.

**Proposals to improve Health Sector**

- Right to Healthcare – Adopting a Right to Healthcare legislation at the Centre and state levels. This would ensure that all residents of the country are entitled to healthcare facilities. Development of a system for Universal Healthcare (UHC) would be a key constituent of this initiative, which would require expansion and strengthening of public health services at all levels. Private providers would also be involved, as per need, to supplement the public health system.
- Increasing the public health expenditure -Increasing the public health expenditure exponentially through taxation. This expenditure should be increased from the current grossly inadequate 1.2 per cent of the GDP to reach 3.5 per cent of the GDP in the next five years, and eventually touch 5 per cent of the GDP in the medium term.
- Strengthening of public health services – Three, ensuring major reform and strengthening of public health services with increased staff and infrastructure. A key component of this reform would be guaranteed provision of free essential medicines and diagnostics to all patients in public health facilities, by adopting systems for procurement and distribution which are similar to the current models in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Rajasthan.
- Health sector human resource policy – there should be a comprehensive health sector human resource policy, which provides upgraded skill training, fair wages, social security and decent working conditions for all public health services staff. The services of all contractual health workers, including ASHAs and anganwadi workers, should be regularised.
- Community-based monitoring and planning – Community-based monitoring and planning of health services that are being practised in a few states should be upscaled and user-friendly grievance redressal systems put in place to ensure social accountability and participation.
- Replacing Schemes – the PMJAY component of Ayushman Bharat, which is based on a discredited insurance model, should be jettisoned. Such schemes need to be replaced by the universal healthcare system.
- Regulations – Private hospitals must be brought under the ambit of regulations by modifying and adopting the Clinical Establishments Act in all states. This legislation must ensure that the Charter of Patient's Rights is observed, it must provide a grievance redressal mechanism to patients, the rates for services must be regulated and standard treatment guidelines should be adopted in healthcare institutions.
- Price Regulations – essential medicines and medical devices must be subject to price regulation, based on their manufacturing cost. A Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices should be put in place to curb unethical marketing practices. Manufacturers should

be asked, in a stepwise manner, to sell medicines only under their generic name, and doctors should be directed to write generic names of medicines in prescriptions.

- Focus on vulnerable Sections – These initiatives must be accompanied by measures to ensure that people with special needs — women, children, differently-abled persons, people living with HIV — enjoy appropriate health services.
- Environment – Traditional social determinants of health such as nutrition, water supply, sanitation and healthy environment must be ensured. There should be plans in place to tackle new determinants like air and water pollution and addictions.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

### **Western Disturbance**

The western disturbance has brought heavy rainfall across various parts of the country.

#### **What is Western Disturbance?**

- It is an extratropical storm originating in the Mediterranean region that brings sudden winter rain to the north-western parts of the Indian sub-continent. It is a non-monsoonal precipitation pattern driven by the westerlies.
- Extratropical storms are a global phenomenon with moisture usually carried in the upper atmosphere, unlike their tropical counterparts where the moisture is carried in the lower atmosphere. In the case of the Indian subcontinent, moisture is sometimes shed as rain when the storm system encounters the Himalayas.

#### **Formation:**

- Western Disturbance originates in the Mediterranean Sea as extra-tropical cyclones. A high-pressure area over Ukraine and neighbourhood consolidates, causing the intrusion of cold air from Polar Regions towards an area of relatively warmer air with high moisture. This generates favourable conditions for cyclogenesis in the upper atmosphere, which promotes the formation of an eastward-moving extratropical depression. They gradually travel across the middle-east from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to enter the Indian sub-continent.

#### **Impact:**

- Plays important role in bringing moderate to heavy rain in low-lying areas and heavy snow to mountainous areas of the Indian Subcontinent.
- This disturbance is usually associated with cloudy sky, higher night temperatures and unusual rain. This precipitation has great importance in agriculture, particularly for the Rabi crops. Wheat among them is one of the most important crops, which helps to meet India's food security.
- Excessive precipitation due to this disturbance can cause crop damage, landslides, floods and avalanches. Over the Indo-Gangetic plains, it occasionally bring cold wave conditions and dense fog. These conditions remain stable until disturbed by another western disturbance. When western disturbances move across northwest India before the onset of monsoon, a temporary advancement of monsoon current appears over the region.

## **INDIAN ECONOMY**

### **Jet Airways' temporary halt**

Jet Airways announced a temporary halt of its operations from Wednesday night as funds to keep the airline going dried up.

#### **Background**

- To the long line of private airline carcasses dotting the bleak landscape of Indian aviation, one more may soon be added.
- Jet Airways announced a temporary halt of its operations from Wednesday night as funds to keep the airline going dried up.
- Despite intense lobbying by the bankrupt airline, banks stood firm on their decision to not release emergency funds to sustain operations until a white knight is found.
- With operations halted and the half a dozen or so planes that were flying till Wednesday grounded, the airline is staring down the barrel, especially because most of its prized

departure slots at major airports across the country have either already been or will soon be allocated to other airlines.

#### Future prospects

- Jet will be able to regain these slots only if it bounces back before the end of the summer schedule in October.
- Whether that will happen is now in the hands of prospective buyers, who are said to have evinced interest in buying the airline during the Expression of Interest (EOI) process called by banks last week.
- The fact that the banks refused to extend emergency support is probably an indicator of the quantity and quality of the EOIs received by them.
- It is hard to believe that they would not have temporarily supported Jet if the EOIs had been serious.
- In sum, it does appear at this point that a miracle will be needed for Jet to take wing again.

#### Reasons for such instances

- The collapse of Jet has caused turbulence in the market and also raised some serious questions over why the domestic airline industry is proving to be so perilous for enterprises.
- There have been more than half-a-dozen private airline companies that have fallen by the wayside in the last decade and more, and it is well-known how Air India is propped up with government support.
- Reckless competition – While it is true that fuel costs, which account for about half of the expenses of running an airline, have been difficult to manage, the fact is that reckless competition is responsible for the sorry plight of the industry.
- Low Margins – Margins in the airline industry are wafer-thin in the best of times and the combined effect of rising fuel prices and the inability to pass them on to consumers due to competition has proved to be a deadly cocktail.
- Similar instances – In the race to the bottom, it was Kingfisher seven years ago, Air Deccan and Air Sahara before that, it is Jet now, and who knows which airline could be next. It is notable that airfares have largely stayed stable over several years, benefiting passengers but biting airlines.

#### Way Forward

- Stopping undercutting – It is time that airlines took stock of their collective plight and stopped undercutting each other on fares.
- Centre's support – The Centre can help too by reviewing fuel taxes and surcharges apart from airport levies, which the airlines complain are too high.
- After all, a healthy airline industry can only be good for government revenues over the long term.

### **ENVIRONMENT- CONSERVATION, BIO-DIVERSITY AND ISSUES**

#### **Indian Forest Act amendment**

It is said that the amendments proposed in the colonial-era Indian Forest Act, 1927 reflect the Centre's attempt to grab natural resources owned by tribals for generations.

Concerns:As per the new draft, forest officials have been given the absolute authority to shoot tribals for "violation of laws". If a forest guard kills an "offender", the move will invite no prosecution by the state governments without first initiating an inquiry into the matter under an executive magistrate. Under the new amendment, forest departments can also declare any forest as reserved and alienate the forest-dwelling communities from their ancestral lands.

#### Highlights of the draft amendment bill:

- The amendment accords significant powers to India's forest officers — including the power issue search warrants, enter and investigate lands within their jurisdictions, and to provide indemnity to forest officers using arms to prevent forest-related offences.
- It seeks to provide indemnity to Forest-officer using arms etc, to prevent the forest offence. Forest-officer not below the rank of a Ranger shall have power to hold an inquiry into forest

offences and shall have the powers to search or issue a search warrant under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

- The amendment defines community as “a group of persons specified on the basis of government records living in a specific locality and in joint possession and enjoyment of common property resources, without regard to race, religion, caste, language and culture”.
- Forest is defined to include “any government or private or institutional land recorded or notified as forest/forest land in any government record and the lands managed by government/community as forest and mangroves, and also any land which the central or state government may by notification declare to be forest for the purpose of this Act.”
- “Village forests”, according to the proposed Act, may be forestland or wasteland, which is the property of the government and would be jointly managed by the community through the Joint Forest Management Committee or Gram Sabha.
- The legislation also proposes a forest development cess of up to 10% of the assessed value of mining products removed from forests, and water used for irrigation or in industries. This amount would be deposited in a special fund and used “exclusively for reforestation; forest protection and other ancillary purposes connected with tree planting, forest development and conservation,” the draft document noted.
- While the preamble of IFA, 1927, said the Act was focused on laws related to transport of forest produce and the tax on it, the amendment has increased the focus to “conservation, enrichment and sustainable management of forest resources and matters connected therewith to safeguard ecological stability to ensure provision of ecosystem services in perpetuity and to address the concerns related to climate change and international commitments”.
- Increased role of states: The amendments say if the state government, after consultation with the central government, feels that the rights under FRA will hamper conservation efforts, then the state “may commute such rights by paying such persons a sum of money in lieu thereof, or grant of land, or in such other manner as it thinks fit, to maintain the social organisation of the forest dwelling communities or alternatively set out some other forest tract of sufficient extent, and in a locality reasonably convenient, for the purpose of such forest dwellers”.
- The amendment also introduces a new category of forests — production forest. These will be forests with specific objectives for production of timber, pulp, pulpwood, firewood, non-timber forest produce, medicinal plants or any forest species to increase production in the country for a specified period.

#### **QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**A river cuts through a rock not because of its power but its persistence.**