

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC**ICMR calls for complete ban on e-cigarettes**

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended a complete ban on e-cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), based on currently available scientific evidence. Last year, the Centre had issued an advisory recommending a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes in India.

Electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS)

- ENDS of which electronic cigarettes are the most common prototype, are devices that do not burn or use tobacco leaves but instead vaporize a solution the user then inhales.
- The main constituents of the solution, in addition to nicotine when nicotine is present, are propylene glycol, with or without glycerol and flavoring agents.
- ENDS solutions and emissions contain other chemicals, some of them considered to be toxicants.

Why such ban?

- Use of ENDS or e-cigarettes has documented adverse effects on humans, which include DNA damage; carcinogenic, cellular, molecular and immunological toxicity; respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological disorders; and adverse impact on fetal development and pregnancy.
- ICMR noted that e-cigarettes and other such devices contained not only nicotine solution, which was highly addictive, but also harmful ingredients such as flavoring agents and vaporizers.

ENDS cannot help quit smoking

- The ICMR paper has rejected the argument that e-cigarettes could help smokers quit tobacco consumption.
- While such benefits have not been firmly established, there is also evidence that there is risk of people continuing to use both them as well as tobacco products.
- In addition, these devices could encourage non-smokers to get addicted to tobacco.
- Various flavors and attractive designs are adding to the allure of the devices, and there was an increasing trend of using e-cigarettes among youth and adolescents in many countries.
- They increase the likelihood to experiment with regular products and increase the intention to indulge in cigarette smoking.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Government launches new 'Jal Shakti' Ministry**

Fulfilling its poll promise, the government has launched a new unified 'Jal Shakti' ministry that is aimed at providing clean drinking water as well as fight India's water woes.

Jal Shakti Ministry

- The new ministry has been formed by merging the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- All water related works will be merged under one ministry.
- The new ministry will encompass issues ranging from providing clean drinking water, international and inter-states water disputes, to the Namami Gange project aimed at cleaning Gang and its tributaries, and sub tributaries.

Why such move?

- All water projects are complementary to each other. It's good to have one ministry to have an integrated data management system.
- In two separate ministries, there was no integration and one will not know where the gap is.
- The need of the hour is the creation of water availability data from various resources on both quality and quantity at one platform.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**SDG Gender Index**

A SDG Gender Index to measure global gender equality ranks India at 95th among 129 countries. This comes close on the heels of the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum where India was ranked 108th.

SDG Gender Index

- It has been developed by Equal Measures 2030, a joint effort of regional and global organisations including African Women's Development and Communication Network, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation etc. It accounts for 14 out of 17 SDGs (sustainable development goals) that cover aspects such as poverty, health, education, literacy, political representation and equality at the workplace.
- A score of 100 reflects the achievement of gender equality in relation to the targets set for each indicator.
- It means, for example, that 100% of girls complete secondary education, or that there is around 50-50 parity for women and men in Parliament.
- A score of 50 signifies that a country is about halfway to meeting a goal.

Key findings for India

- India's highest goal scores are on health (79.9), hunger & nutrition (76.2), and energy (71.8). Its lowest goal scores are on partnerships (18.3, in the bottom 10 countries worldwide), industry, infrastructure and innovation (38.1), and climate (43.4).
- On indicators that define such goals, India scored 95.3 on the percentage of female students enrolled in primary education who are overage.
- Some of India's lowest scores on indicators include the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (score 23.6; women made up 11.8% of Parliament in 2018).
- On seats held by women in the Supreme Court (4%), India has a score of 18.2.

Gender-based violence

- On gender-based violence, indicators include proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (27.3%)
- Women who agreed that a husband/partner is justified in beating his wife/partner under certain circumstances (47.0%) and
- Women aged 15+ who reported that they "feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where she lives" (69.1%)

Global Scenario

- The ranking found that the world is far from achieving gender equality with 1.4 billion girls and women living in countries that get a "very poor" grade.
- The global average score of the 129 countries — which represent 95% of the world's girls and women — is 65.7 out of 100 ("poor" in the index).
- Altogether, 2.8 billion girls and women live in countries that get either a "very poor" (59 and below) or "poor" score (60-69) on gender equality.
- Just 8% of the world's population of girls and women live in countries that received a "good" gender equality score (80-89) and no country achieved an "excellent" overall score of 90 or above.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data for 2017-18

The govt has finally released Annual Report of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 and the Quarterly Bulletin PLFS.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)

- The PLFS was launched from 1st April 2017.
- Primary aim of the PLFS is to generate reasonably accurate indicators of labour market at a short span for every quarter for which speed of quality data collection and processing are important.
- PLFS was launched with the objective of measuring employment every three months in urban areas and once a year in both rural and urban areas.
- The quarterly survey only captures data classed as current weekly status (CWS), while the annual survey measures both the usual status and CWS.
- The NSSO was historically conducting Employment and Unemployment Surveys as part of its National Sample Surveys.

Who are the Unemployed?

- Labour force means people working or looking for jobs in the age group of 15-29 years.

- CWS Method: A person who is unable to get work for even an hour in the last seven days despite seeking employment is considered unemployed.
- Usual Status Method: Under this, the employment activity of a person is determined on the basis of a reference period of 365 days preceding the date of the survey.

Trends

- Labour force participation has been declining and touched 36.9% in 2017-18 as more among them, especially females, enrolled for higher studies.
- The youth accounted for 28.2% of urban males and 27.8% of urban females.
- During 2017-18, among people aged 15-29 years, the share of the educated was 65.8% among urban males. It was 65.4% among urban females.
- A higher percentage of males compared to females had received either formal or non-formal vocational training.

Reality of jobless growth

- The rising unemployment rate despite falling labour force participation for the youth is more worrying.
- This is likely to raise questions about whether India is suffering from jobless growth.
- According to Census 2011, India has 333 million youth—a number that is likely to touch 367 million in 2021 and 370 million by 2031.
- With this huge rise in youth unemployment, it is hard to reconcile this information with the EPFO data that people keep talking about, because a majority of the new entrants to EPFO would be the younger people.

Pension scheme for small shopkeepers, retail traders

The newly-inducted Union Cabinet, in its first meeting, approved a mega pension scheme to provide a minimum assured pension of Rs.3000 per month to all small shopkeepers and retail traders.

New Pension Scheme for small shopkeepers, retail traders

- The new scheme is a part of PM universal social security programme.
- Under the scheme, all shopkeepers, retail traders and self-employed persons are guaranteed a monthly pension amount of Rs. 3,000 once they attain the age of 60 years.
- It aims at benefiting over 3 crore traders and shopkeepers.
- The new scheme is a voluntary and contributory pension scheme on a 50:50 basis where a prescribed age-specific contribution shall be made by the beneficiary and a matching contribution by the central government.
- For example if an individual contributes Rs.100 per month, then the central government also contributes the equal amount as subsidy into subscriber's pension account every month.

Beneficiaries of the scheme

- All small shopkeepers and self-employed persons as well as the retail traders with GST turnover below Rs.5 crore and age between 18-40 years can enroll for this scheme.
- To make it easier for the trading community, minimal documentation is required to avail the scheme.
- One needs the 12-digit Aadhaar card number and the bank account details for enrolling in the pension scheme.
- Common people can enroll themselves through over 3.25 lakh common service centres spread across the country.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

UdChalo Initiative

- In a bid to make wounded soldiers, who are now confined to wheelchairs, self-reliant, an initiative 'UdChalo' is all set to take off at the Army's Paraplegic Rehabilitation Centre (PRC).
- 'UdChalo' is a travel portal that caters for the personal travel of the military and paramilitary forces personnel by aggregating defence fares and getting exclusive discounts.
- It aims to empower the disabled military veterans.
- The initiative is unique and has given a new lease of life of these soldiers who are now confined to wheelchairs.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- EVERYDAY SCIENCE, SPACE, NUCLEAR, DEFENCE
ETC****Parthenogenesis**

About a week ago, the New England Aquarium in the US announced that a “virgin” anaconda had given birth during the winter. This is Immaculate Conception in Catholicism; in scientific terminology, it is parthenogenesis. This is only the second known case of parthenogenesis in green anacondas. It is not unknown in snakes, but undocumented enough to make it to scientific journals.

Parthenogenesis

- The term parthenogenesis is an amalgam of the Greek words parthenos meaning virgin and genesis meaning origin.
- About 2,000 species are known to reproduce through parthenogenesis, which is one of the known means of asexual reproduction.
- It is a reproductive strategy that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilisation.
- It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals (particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps and bees) and rarely among higher vertebrates”.
- A gamete is the egg in females and the sperm in males. In animals, parthenogenesis means development of an embryo from an unfertilized egg cell.
- Many species that reproduce through parthenogenesis do not reproduce sexually. Others switch between the two modes taking cues from the environment.

How are the babies?

- Babies born through parthenogenesis are clones of the mother, as has now been confirmed by the aquarium through DNA tests.
- Parthenogenetic offspring tend to be clones of the parent because there has been no exchange and rearrangement of genetic information with another individual as happens in case of a sexual reproductive process.
- In some species, offspring born by parthenogenesis from a mother can also be male but it lacks one X chromosome.

DEFENCE**National Defence Fund**

PM Modi has approved changes to the Prime Minister’s Scholarship Scheme for wards of deceased defence personnel under the National Defence Fund as his first decision on assuming office.

National Defence Fund

- NDF is an Indian Government Institution, set up in the year 1962 to receive voluntary donations for the promotion and welfare of the members of the Indian Armed Forces (including paramilitary forces) and their dependents.
- The NDF is administered by an executive committee that has the Prime Minister as the chairperson and the Defence, Finance and Home Ministers as members.
- Donations to the National Defence Fund are 100% tax exempt.
- Under the scheme, new scholarships are given to 5,500 wards of armed forces personnel, 2,000 wards of paramilitary forces personnel and 150 wards of forces under the Railways Ministry every year.

Prime Minister’s Scholarship Scheme

- The scheme is meant to encourage technical and postgraduate education for widows and wards of deceased personnel of the armed forces, the paramilitary forces and the Railway Protection Force.
- PMO approved the increase from Rs.2,000 to Rs.2,500 a month for boys and from ₹2,250 to Rs.3,000 a month for girls.
- The ambit of the scheme was widened to cover the wards of State police officials martyred in terror or Naxal attacks.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The harder you work for something, the greater you will feel when you achieve it