

GOVERNANCE**Intellectual Property Protection for Covid-19 Vaccines**

Waiving Intellectual Property (IP) protection for Covid-19 vaccines supported by The United States has announced.

Key Points**About:**

- The 1995 agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) requires ratifying countries to adopt a minimum standard of intellectual property rights to protect creators and promote innovation.
- India and South Africa have proposed a waiver from the implementation and application of certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement (waiving IP rights like patents, copyright, and trademarks) for prevention, containment or treatment of Covid-19.

Need to Waive Patents on Covid Vaccines:

- **Monopoly of Drug Companies:** At present, only drug companies which own patents are authorised to manufacture Covid vaccines. A lifting of patents will allow the formula to be shared with other companies.
- **Vaccine Cost:** Once the formula is shared, any company which possesses the required technology and infrastructure can produce vaccines. This will lead to cheaper and more generic versions of Covid vaccines and will be a big step in overcoming vaccine shortage.
- **Inequitable Distribution of Vaccines:** This has opened up a glaring gap between developing and wealthier countries now. The countries having surplus doses of vaccines have already vaccinated a considerable percentage of their population and are returning to normalcy. Whereas, the poorer nations continue to face shortages, have overburdened healthcare systems and hundreds dying daily.
- **Against the Interests of the World:** The longer Covid circulates in developing nations, there is a greater chance of more vaccine-resistant, deadly mutations of the virus emerging.

Significance for India:

- **Help in Increasing Production:** The bulk of the vaccine doses produced in India are taken up by foreign countries which could pay more for the doses.
- This move can help scale up production to meet demand besides making the vaccines more affordable for everyone.
- **Preparation for the Third Wave:** Indian authorities have stated that the third wave of the pandemic is inevitable.

Counter Arguments:

- **Vaccine Quality and Safety may get Compromised:** Lifting of patents would be a compromise on control of safety and quality standards for vaccine manufacturing.
- **Disincentive Pharmaceutical Companies:** Lifting of patents would be a huge deterrent to investing heavily on vaccine development during pandemics in the future.
- **Can Lead to Confusion:** Eliminating those protections would undermine the global response to the pandemic, including ongoing effort to tackle new variants. It will create confusion that could potentially undermine public confidence in vaccine safety, and create a barrier to information sharing.

SOCIAL ISSUE**Maratha Reservation Struck Down**

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) declared a Maharashtra law which provides reservation benefits to the Maratha community, taking the quota limit in the State in excess of 50%, as unconstitutional.

Key Points

Background:

- **2017:** A 11-member commission headed by Retired Justice N G Gaikwad recommended Marathas should be given reservation under Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC).
- **2018:** Maharashtra Assembly passed a Bill proposing 16% reservation for Maratha community.
- **2018:** The Bombay High Court while upholding the reservation pointed out that instead of 16% it should be reduced to 12% in education and 13% in jobs.
- **2020:** The SC stayed its implementation and referred the case to Chief Justice of India for a larger bench.

Current Ruling:

- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:**
 1. A separate reservation for the Maratha community violates Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (due process of law).
 2. Reservation breaching the 50% limit will create a society based on "caste rule".
 3. The Maratha reservation of 12% and 13% (in education and jobs) had increased the overall reservation ceiling to 64% and 65%, respectively.
 4. In the Indira Sawhney judgment 1992, SC had categorically said 50% shall be the rule, only in certain exceptional and extraordinary situations for bringing far-flung and remote areas' population into mainstream said 50% rule can be relaxed.
- **No Further Benefits:** Appointments made under the Maratha quota following the Bombay High Court judgment endorsing the State law would hold, but they would get no further benefits.
- **Deprived States of the Power to Identify SEBCs:** There will only be a single list of SEBC with respect to each State and Union Territory notified by the President of India, and that States can only make recommendations for inclusion or exclusion, with any subsequent change to be made only by Parliament.
The Bench unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the 102nd Constitution Amendment but differed on the question whether it affected the power of states to identify SEBCs.
- **Direction to NCBC:** Asked the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) to expedite the recommendation of SEBCs so that the President can publish the notification containing the list of SEBCs in relation to States and Union Territories expeditiously.

INDIAN ECONOMY

Export of Organic Millets

APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) has sourced ragi (finger millet), and jhingora (barnyard millet) from farmers in Uttarakhand for exports. In a major boost to exports of organic products from the country, the first consignment of millets grown in the Himalayas would be exported to Denmark.

Key Points

National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP):

- The NPOP has been implemented by APEDA since its inception in 2001 as notified under the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulations) Act, 1992.
- NPOP covers standards for crops and their products, live stocks and poultry products, aquaculture, apiculture etc. The exports from the country are as per the provisions in NPOP.
- The NPOP certification has been recognized by the European Union and Switzerland which enables India to export unprocessed plant products to these countries without the requirement of additional certification. It also facilitates export of Indian organic products to the United Kingdom even in the post Brexit phase.
- NPOP has also been recognized by the Food Safety Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) for trade of organic products in the domestic market.
- Organic products covered under the bilateral agreement with NPOP need not to be recertified for import in India.

Organic Farming: According to FSSAI, 'organic farming' is a system of farm design and management to create an ecosystem of agriculture production without the use of synthetic external inputs such as chemical fertilisers, pesticides and synthetic hormones or genetically modified organisms.

Related Initiatives:

- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North East Region (MOVCDNER).
- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), etc.
- The Indian state of Sikkim achieved the feat of being the world's first organic state and was awarded the UN Future Policy Gold Award 2018, also known as the Oscar for best policies.

Status of India's Export of Organic Food:

- India's export of organic food products rose by more than 51% to Rs. 7078 crore during April-February (2020-21) compared to the same period in the previous fiscal (2019-20). In terms of quantity, the exports of organic food products grew by 39%.
- Oil cake meal is a major commodity of the organic product exports from the country followed by oil seeds, fruit pulps and purees, cereals & millets, spices, tea, medicinal plant products, dry fruits, sugar, pulses, coffee, essential oil etc.
- India's organic products have been exported to 58 countries including USA, European Union, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, Switzerland, Israel and South Korea.

2. Model Insurance Villages

The IRDAI has mooted the concept of 'Model Insurance Village (MIV)' to boost insurance penetration in rural areas.

Key Points

Concept of Model Insurance Village (MIV):

- The idea is to offer comprehensive insurance protection to all the major insurable risks that villagers are exposed to and make available covers at affordable or subsidised cost.
- In order to make the premium affordable, financial support needs to be explored through NABARD, other institutions, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funds, government support and support from reinsurance companies.
- It may be implemented in a minimum of 500 villages in different districts of the country in the first year and increased to 1,000 villages in the subsequent two years.
- Every general insurance company and reinsurance company accepting general insurance business and having offices in India needs to be involved for piloting the concept.

Possible Offerings under MIV:

- Weather Index product or hybrid product combining weather index and indemnity-based insurance protection for various crops that remains uncovered under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna (PMFBY).
- Flexible Farm Insurance Package Policies targeting comprehensive needs of crops, livestock, farmer, farm implements.
- Separate products for high value agriculture, contract farming and corporate farming community as their needs are different.
- States can be offered macro insurance covers based on predefined parametric weather indexes covering large complex risks arising out of natural catastrophes affecting the agriculture ecosystem and rural economy.

Challenges in Spreading Insurance to Rural Areas:

- Lack of awareness, limited choice of insurance products, absence of people-friendly and transparent claim settlement mechanisms, and weak network of insurance firms, are some of the issues and challenges in advancing growth of rural insurance business.

NATIONAL ISSUE

One Year of Covid--19' Report:

A report titled 'State of Working India 2021: One Year of Covid-19' brought out annually by Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment, Bengaluru has been released.

Key Points

Impact

- **Impact on Employment:** 100 million jobs were lost during the April-May 2020 lockdown. Though most of these workers had found employment by June 2020, about 15 million remained out of work.
- **Impact on Income:** For an average household of four members, the monthly per capita income in October 2020 (Rs. 4,979) was still below its level in January 2020 (Rs. 5,989). Monthly earnings of workers fell on an average by 17% during the pandemic, with self employed and informal salaried workers facing the highest loss of earnings.
- **Informalisation:** Post-lockdown, nearly half of salaried workers had moved into informal work, either as self-employed (30%), casual wage (10%) or informal salaried (9%).
- **Regressive Nature of Economic Impact:** The bottom 20% of households earned nothing in the months of April and May 2020. On the other hand, the top 10% suffered the least during the lockdown, and only lost about 20% of their February income during the lockdown months.
- **Disproportionate Impact on Women:** During the lockdown and in the post lockdown months, 61% of working men remained employed while 7% lost their job and did not return to work. But in the case of women, only 19% remained employed while 47% suffered a permanent job loss, "not returning to work even by the end of 2020".
- **Increase in Poverty Rate:** The job loss and fall in earnings caused a large increase in poverty. Households coped with the loss of income by decreasing their food intake, selling assets and borrowing informally from friends, relatives and money-lenders. With 230 million falling below the national minimum wage threshold of Rs. 375 per day during the pandemic, poverty rate has "increased by 15 percentage points in rural and nearly 20 percentage points in urban areas".

Suggestions

- As India confronts the second wave and what is possibly its worst humanitarian crisis in recent years, urgent policy measures are needed to support an already beleaguered population.
- The extra Public Distribution System (PDS) entitlements under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) need to be extended till the end of the year.
- Cash transfers of Rs. 5,000 for three months to as many vulnerable households as can be reached with the existing digital infrastructure, including but not limited to Jan Dhan accounts.
- MGNREGA (Mahatma National Gandhi Employment Guarantee Act) has played a vital role and its allocation needs to be expanded.
- A pilot urban employment programme can be launched in the worst hit districts, possibly focused on women workers.
- A Covid-19 hardship allowance of Rs. 30,000 (Rs.5,000 per month for six months) should be announced for 2.5 million Anganwadi and ASHA workers who have been at the frontlines of the grassroots fight against the virus.

IMPORTANT FACTS FOR PRELIM

1. SVAMITVA Scheme

Recently, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has released the new framework for implementation of the SVAMITVA Scheme. SVAMITVA stands for Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas.

Key Points

About

- **Launch:** It is a center sector scheme which was launched nationally on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day on 24th April 2021.
- **Aim:** To provide an integrated property validation solution for rural India.
- **Features:** The demarcation of rural inhabited areas would be done using Drone survey and CORS (Continuously Operating Reference Stations) Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cms. This would provide the 'record of rights' to village household owners possessing houses in inhabited rural areas in villages. It will cover around 6.62 Lakh villages of the entire country during 2021-2025.
- **Objectives:**
 1. To bring financial stability to the citizens in rural India by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
 2. Creation of accurate land records for rural planning.
 3. Determination of property tax.
 4. Creation of survey infrastructure and GIS (Geographic Information System) maps that can be leveraged by any department for their use.
 5. To support in preparation of better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) by making use of GIS maps.
 6. To reduce property related disputes and legal cases

DAILY ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

Q. "India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade." Discuss the statement in the light of drug abuse problems in India especially in the border areas. (150 words)

Ans:

Introduction

Recently, AIIMS submitted its report "Magnitude of Substance Use in India" to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Key highlights of the report are:

1. Around 5 crore Indians reported to have used cannabis and opioids at the time of the survey (conducted in the year 2018).
2. It has been estimated that there are about 8.5 lakh people who inject drugs.
3. Of the total cases estimated by the report, more than half of them are contributed by states like Punjab, Assam, Delhi, Haryana, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.
4. About 60 lakh people are estimated to need help for their opioid use problems.

Body

India and Illicit Drug Trade

- **Major Hub of Illicit Drug Trade:** According to a report by the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade ranging from age-old cannabis to newer prescription drugs like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine.
- **Drug Trafficking Routes:** India is in the middle of two major illicit opium production regions in the world, the Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan) in the west and the Golden Triangle (South-East Asia) in the east.

Golden Triangle

- It represents the region coinciding with the rural mountains of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.
- It is Southeast Asia's main opium-producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and North America.

Golden Crescent

- This region of South Asia is a principal global site for opium production and distribution.

- It comprises Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

Associated Challenges

- **Easy Borders:** The borders are porous and difficult to control in the lower Mekong region so cross-border movements and drug trafficking are rampant in the region.
- **Evolving Ways of Trafficking:** The methods of containerised trafficking, couriers and body-packing have reduced are some ways of drug movement in India.
- **Limited Control:** There is limited government control in the Golden Triangle and trafficking continues at high volumes.
- **Unaffected Supply:** The supply of precursor chemicals is easier because major organised crime groups source chemicals through direct diversion from industry and not diversion from illicit overseas trade channels.

Way Forward

- Additional efforts would be required at the national, regional, and international level to carefully analyse methods and trends to understand changes to drug markets in the wake of the pandemic.
- There is a need to understand the change in the strategy of drug trafficking organisations as a result of the Covid-19 measures.
- Therefore, use of maritime trafficking routes from Myanmar along the Andaman Sea, some of which cross Indian territorial waters must be strategically observed by India to curb the trafficking.
- Moreover, methods or procedures to deal with illicit drug supply, their usage must be institutionalised in order to ensure that fight against this menace is not compromised in face of a pandemic or any other crisis.
- Addiction should not be seen as a character flaw, but as an ailment that any other person could be struggling with. Therefore, the stigma associated with drug taking needs to be reduced.

Conclusion

- Drug addiction and trafficking can harm the national security and integrity of a nation and degrades the human resource of a country.
- With the advent of coronavirus, the intensity of the illicit drug trade in India is expected to rise. The government needs to implement the existing laws strictly to prevent drug trafficking and its resultant drug abuse.

DAILY QUIZ

Q.1 The “Net Zero Producers Forum” was in news recently, is an initiative of:

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- The UNEP Secretariat
- The UNFCCC Secretariat
- None of the above**

Q.2 What is “Tianhe module”, sometimes seen in the news?

- Russia’s planned space station
- China’s planned space station**
- the first rocket to run on biofuel
- none of the above

Q.3 The Kidd Mine is currently the deepest base metal mine in the world, is located in:

- Mexico
- United States of America
- Canada**
- China

Q.4 The Indian scientists recently developed a new Soy Bean variety called the “MACS 1407”. In the context of this, consider the following statements:

1. It is developed by scientists from Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IAC), Kolkata.
2. It is a high yielding variety that gives 100 quintals per hectare.
3. It is best suited for cultivation in the rain fed regions of North East India.

Which of the given above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 3 only**
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Q. 5 Which one of the following has become the first country to announce regulation of use of self-driving vehicles?

- (a) United States of America
- (b) Germany
- (c) Japan
- (d) United Kingdom**



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