

**GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND INTERVENTIONS**

- ❖ **Rajasthan Right to Health Bill: What the provisions say, why it is seeing opposition and protests**
- **CONTEXT: The Rajasthan Assembly on March 21 passed the Right to Health (RTH), even as doctors continued their protest against the Bill, demanding its complete withdrawal.**
- **What is the Rajasthan Right to Health Bill?**
  - RTH gives every resident of the state the right to avail free Out Patient Department (OPD) services and In Patient Department (IPD) services at all public health facilities and select private facilities.
  - The free healthcare services, including consultation, drugs, diagnostics, emergency transport, procedure and emergency care, will be provided subject to conditions specified in the rules, which will be formulated now.
  - Also, all residents will be entitled to emergency treatment and care without prepayment of any fee or charges, and the hospital can't delay treatment on grounds of police clearance if it is a medico-legal case. The legislation says that "after emergency care, stabilisation and transfer of patient, if patient does not pay requisite charges, the healthcare provider shall be entitled to receive requisite fee and charges or proper reimbursement from the state government".
  - The Bill extends a total of 20 Rights to the citizens of the state.
- **Doesn't Rajasthan already have health schemes?**
  - Under the present government's flagship Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme, free treatment up to Rs 10 lakh is provided. This has been increased to Rs 25 lakh in the latest budget, which will be implemented from the next financial year. Under this scheme, the government paid as many as 34.77 lakh claims worth Rs 1,940 crore between April 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022.
  - Secondly, there is the Rajasthan Government Health Scheme for government employees, which includes ministers, current and former MLAs, etc.
  - Third is the Nishulk Nirogi Rajasthan, which also includes the Free Medicine scheme. Under this, all OPD and IPD services in government hospitals, including the registration fee, are provided for free. It covers about 1,600 medicines, 928 surgicals and 185 sutures. As of December 2022 end, it had benefitted 8.6 crore patients at a cost of Rs 1,072 crore between March-December 2022.
  - Four, there is the Free Test scheme which provides for up to 90 free tests in government hospitals attached with medical colleges, 56 tests in district, sub-district hospitals, and so on. Between March-December 2022, 2.93 crore persons had benefited from it.
- **So what was the need for the RTH?**
  - Healthcare is close to the heart of Chief Minister Gehlot, who had come up with the Chiranjeevi scheme, and is pushing to develop Rajasthan as a model state when it comes to health. However, his government has often been panned over the implementation of the Chiranjeevi scheme, especially at the end of private hospitals.
  - During the debate on the Bill in the Assembly, Health minister said, "It is true that despite having a Chiranjeevi card, hospitals sometimes ask a patient for money, to deposit an advance. There are lot of complaints, and government have even made hospitals return such money hence it needs to bringing this Bill.
  - As per the Bill, anyone found in contravention of the Act will be punishable with a fine of up to Rs 10,000 for the first contravention; and up to Rs 25,000 for the subsequent contraventions. However, many have pointed out that the penalty may be too low for hospitals.
- **What is the clause about emergency in the RTH?**
  - One of the most contentious issues of the RTH was emergency care, leading to protests by doctors.
  - After being changed by the Select Committee, the clause that was eventually passed recently states that people will have the right to emergency treatment and care for accidental emergency, emergency due to snake bite/animal bite and any other emergency decided by the State Health Authority under prescribed emergency circumstances.
  - Importantly, this can be availed without prepayment of requisite fee or charges for prompt and necessary emergency medical treatment and critical care, emergency obstetric treatment and care, by any public or private health institution qualified to provide such care or treatment according to their level of health care.
- **What is the Opposition's objection to the Bill?**
  - During the debate on the Bill the BJP's opposition primarily centred on two points. It demanded that in case of private facilities, only multispecialty hospitals with 50 beds be included and that there should be a single forum for complaints.
    - ✓ The Health Minister said that this specification for private hospitals will be included in the Rules made as part of the Act.
  - Deputy Leader of Opposition demanded that the government incorporate these two points in the Bill itself.
  - Opposition argue on the demand for a single window system for redressal; "Right now, in Rajasthan a complaint against the doctors with the Medical Council, Consumer Court can register under the Medical Protection Act, with the Human Rights Commission there are 50 places where one can complain against a doctor.", "Now the government adding one more forum for complaints. Will the doctor practice or only occupy himself with redressal of complaints" opposition argues.

➤ **Why are doctors protesting?**

- Jaipur Association of Resident Doctors (JARD), questioned the need for the RTH. “When there is already have schemes such as Chiranjeevi which cover the majority of the population under existing rules, why bring RTH and impose it on doctors?” and there are several clauses doctors are still objecting to, including defining ‘emergency’, and “compelling doctors of one speciality to treat patients outside their speciality as part of emergency.”
- ✓ However, the government has repeatedly said that the definition of “emergency” was reworked only after consultations with doctor associations, while the second part will be addressed in the Rules which will be made subsequently, and hence there is no question of compelling doctors to treat outside their speciality.
- IMA Rajasthan has demanded inclusion of several clauses in the Bill. One of them lists nine “responsibilities and duties” that the patients and caretakers should have towards the healthcare facilities: be respectful to providers; avoid crowding with a patient; not to be abusive or with violent behaviour; timely meet financial responsibilities,” etc.
- Another clause lists as many as 17 “Rights of Health Care Providers,” such as “to be treated with respect by patients and the person attending the patient; to be duly informed when patients are seeking a second opinion; to get the tests done in-house or the nearest lab in case of an emergency to prevent delay in patient care; cost of treatment reimbursement must be within 15 days through a separate portal other than government health insurance schemes,” etc.
- ✓ The suggestions were received after a meeting with office bearers from across the state, and as these demands were not included, the Bill should have been dropped.
- ✓ However, government sources said the latest demands are an “addendum” to the doctors’ earlier demands, almost all of which have already been met, and accused the protesting doctors of constantly shifting goalposts so that the Bill is not passed in any form.
- Earlier, the doctors’ objection was that they were not consulted before the formulation of the Bill. They had two major objections: that emergency be defined properly, and that their representatives be included in the state and district health authorities which, they claimed, were dominated by bureaucrats and politicians.
- ✓ According to the government official: government defined the term emergency as per their demand, and even removed the provision for the government nominating two members to state and district authorities in the Bill, and went as far as replacing it with a provision for IMA itself to nominate two representatives to district and state authorities. In the district committee, it also removed Zila Pramukh and three Pradhans of Panchayat Samiti.
- Official alleged that “Essentially, right now, the private hospitals act on their whims, like insisting on in-house investigation reports, declining to hand over files. The system lacks transparency and they often over-charge for various services. Once the citizens are made aware of their rights through the Act and the system becomes more transparent with the involvement of the government, then perhaps the hospitals won’t be able to mint as much money by charging deceptively. That’s the real reason behind the doctors’ protest.
- ✓ The Bill empowers patients “to choose source of obtaining medicines or tests at all health care establishments”, which means that hospitals cannot insist on in-house medicines or tests.
- ✓ If a patient wishes to leave, they will have to be given “treatment summary in case of a patient leaving health care establishment against the medical advice,” or “to obtain treatment records and information from the treating health care establishments to seek second opinion from another health care professional or health care establishment.”

**AGRICULTURE**

❖ **Agriculture and groundwater depletion**

➤ **CONTEXT:** The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources recently tabled the report, “Groundwater: A Valuable but Diminishing Resource”.

➤ **Report Highlights and committee suggestions**

✚ **Issue of excessive exploitation of groundwater & free electricity:**

- States like Punjab, Haryana, Telangana and Tamil Nadu offer completely free power, while other states have provision for collection of token charges.
- Observing that the primary reason for excessive exploitation of groundwater is wide cultivation of water guzzler paddy and sugarcane crops, which are “heavily incentivized”, a Parliamentary Standing Committee has said that the use of electric pumps needs to be further discouraged.

✚ **Suggested measure:**

- The committee has suggested introducing measures such prepaid cards for power supply and restricting power supply to few hours a day.
- The committee has also asked the government to devise “integrated measures” for adoption in agriculture to reduce dependence on groundwater in agriculture.
- The committee has recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation under the Jal Shakti Ministry should take the initiative by urging both the Power Ministry and Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare along with state governments to take measures on the suggested lines.

**Issue with restricting electricity:**

- Electricity is a concurrent subject and SERCs determine the electricity tariff for retail supply of electricity to end consumers under the extant provisions of Electricity Act, 2003. So, both the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare “have expressed inability to persuade states to reduce/stop subsidies for power given in agriculture.
- The committee said that there is a need for a shift in focus from ‘land productivity’ to ‘water productivity’.
- **Issue of groundwater depletion due to agriculture**
- India is the world’s second-largest producer of wheat, and rice and is home to more than 600 million farmers.
- The country has achieved impressive food-production gains since the 1960s, due to an increased reliance on irrigation wells, which allowed Indian farmers to expand production into the mostly dry winter and summer seasons
- ✓ These gains have come at a cost with severe groundwater depletion, the cropping intensity or the amount of land planted in the winter season may decrease by up to 20% by 2025.
- ✓ The country that produces 10% of the world’s crops is now the world’s largest consumer of groundwater.
- ✓ The aquifers are rapidly becoming depleted across India.
- State-wise data:
- ✓ Extraction of groundwater for meeting irrigation needs is prevalent mainly in northern states, particularly in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, which are extracting 97%, 90% and 86% of groundwater, respectively, for this purpose.
- ✓ Other states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh are also significant users of groundwater for irrigation as they are using approximately 89%, 92% and 90%, respectively, of their total groundwater extraction for agricultural purposes.
- **Government Initiatives**
- Under Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana of Ministry of Power, separate components of agriculture and non-agriculture feeders have been created for facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agriculture & non-agriculture consumers in rural areas.
- ✓ Punjab has introduced a scheme by way of which farmers were refunded money if they consumed less electricity.
- National Water Policy, 2012 has laid emphasis on the periodic assessment of groundwater resources on a scientific basis.
- Atal Bhujal Yojana focus of the on community participation and demand side intervention for sustainable groundwater management in identified water stressed areas.
- Under Jal Jeevan Mission provisions have been made for source recharging like dedicated bore well recharge structures, rain water recharge, rejuvenation of existing water bodies, etc.
- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana aims to enhance physical access of water on farm and for expanding the cultivable area under assured irrigation, improve on-farm water use efficiency, introducing sustainable water conservation practices, etc.
- Per Drop More Crop mainly focuses on water use efficiency at farm level through micro irrigation (drip and sprinkler irrigation system).
- Water being a State subject, it is for the State Governments to take up rejuvenation of water bodies like formulation of action plan for rejuvenation of dry ponds, puddles and wells in their jurisdiction.
- National Aquifer Mapping and Management program (NAQUIM) is being implemented by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) as part of Ground Water Management and Regulation (GWM&R) Scheme, a central sector scheme.
- **Way ahead**
- The exploitation and sale of groundwater by large corporations should be monitored on a continuous basis.
- Both Central and State governments must take continuous steps to store rainwater in all possible ways to increase recharge. Rainwater harvesting system must be made mandatory in every household, particularly in big cities where groundwater has been declining alarmingly.
- Considering the groundwater balance, MSPs for crops should be fixed according to the consumption of water; higher prices for crops that require less water and vice-versa.
- Micro-irrigation (drip and sprinkler), which can save about 50 percent of water in the cultivation of different crops, should be promoted in the over-exploited blocks to reduce the exploitation of groundwater.
- People from all walks of life must continue to be made aware of water literacy and on the hazardous effects of rapidly declining groundwater.

**PRELIMS**

**1. World Meteorological Day**

- **CONTEXT:** Every year on March 23, World Meteorological Day (WMD) is observed to honour the founding of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).
- The day symbolises the importance of how human behaviour and the atmosphere of the Planet are intertwined.
- Since 1961, several themes have been used to honour this day. It highlights the significant contribution of the meteorological division to the security and well-being of the nations.

- The Theme for WMD 2023 is 'The Future of Weather, Climate and Water across Generations.' It emphasises the effects of climate change and actions to safeguard the environment for future generations.
- **World Meteorological Organisation**
- Following the Vienna International Meteorological Congress, the WMO was founded in 1873 by the International Meteorological Organization. Geneva, Switzerland serves as its headquarters.
- On March 23, 1950, the World Meteorological Organization became the UN's specialised organisation for operational hydrology and meteorology.
- This organisation uses the most recent information on meteorology, climatology, hydrology, and related geophysical research to contribute to the safety and welfare of society.
- The WMO seeks to assist developing and vulnerable nations in addressing the socioeconomic effects of extreme weather and other environmental occurrences and in pursuing sustainable development.
- It aims to develop the standardisation of meteorological data and promotes meteorology training and research for the benefit of various sectors.
- 2. **Sharda Peeth**
- **CONTEXT: Union Home Minister said the government would move forward to open a corridor to the Sharda Peeth in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) on the lines of the Kartarpur corridor.**
- The Sharda Peeth, a revered site for the Hindu community.
- It is located in the Neelum Valley in PoK in the valley of Mount Harmukh.
- It is a ruined Hindu temple and ancient centre of learning.
- Between the 6th and 12th centuries CE, it was among the most prominent temple universities in the Indian subcontinent.
- It played a key role in the development and popularisation of the Sharada script in North India, causing the script to be named after it, and Kashmir to acquire the moniker "Sharada Desh.
- As one of the Maha Shakti Peethas, Hindus believe that it represents the spiritual location of the goddess Sati's fallen right hand.
- Sharada Peeth is one of the three holiest sites of pilgrimage for Kashmiri Pandits, alongside the Martand Sun Temple and the Amarnath Temple.
- 3. **World Happiness Report 2023**
- **CONTEXT: On the occasion of 'International Day of Happiness', annually observed on March 20, 'World Happiness Report' unveiled its 11th edition this year.**
- The World Happiness Report is based on people's own assessment of their happiness, as well as economic and social data.
- It was first published in 2012 and published annually since then. 2023 report is its 11<sup>th</sup> edition.
- The report is published by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN-SDSN).
- The report considers 6 key factors: social support, income, health, freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.
- It assigns a happiness score based on an average of data over a 3-year period.
- The 2023 report ranked 137 countries on the list.
- For the 6<sup>th</sup> year running, Finland was named the world's happiest country followed by Denmark and Iceland.
- Israel occupied fourth position, up 5 spots from last year.
- War-scarred Afghanistan has occupied the bottom spot (137<sup>th</sup>) on the table since 2020.
- Its humanitarian crisis deepen since the Taliban government took power in 2021 following the US-led military pull-out.
- Ukraine's ranking improved from 98 to 92 this year, despite the Russian invasion.
- But Ukraine's overall score fell from 5.084 to 5.071, on a scale of zero to 10.
- India was ranked 126<sup>th</sup> on the report (136<sup>th</sup> in 2022).
- Nepal featured at 78, China at 64, Bangladesh at 118 and Sri Lanka at 112 and Pakistan at 108.
- 4. **Padma Awards**
- **CONTEXT: The President had approved 106 Padma awards on the eve of Republic Day and over 54 people were given recently.**
- Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian honors of India announced annually on the eve of Republic Day after the Bharat Ratna.
- The Award seeks to recognize achievements in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved.
- The total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.
- The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name.
- **Categories:** The Awards are given in three categories:
  - ✓ Padma Vibhushan is awarded for 'exceptional and distinguished service.
  - ✓ Padma Bhushan is awarded for 'distinguished service of a high order.
  - ✓ Padma Shri is awarded for 'distinguished service.

➤ **Eligibility:**

- All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these Awards.
- The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously.
- A higher category of Padma award can be conferred on a person only where a period of at least five years has elapsed since conferment of the earlier Padma award. However, in highly deserving cases, a relaxation can be made by the Awards Committee.

➤ **Nominations for the awards:** All nominations are placed before the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year. The Committee is headed by the Cabinet Secretary and includes Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons as members. The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

➤ **Background:** The Government of India instituted two civilian awards-Bharat Ratna & Padma Vibhushan in 1954. The Padma Vibhushan had three classes namely Pehela Varg, Dusra Varg and Tisra Varg. These were subsequently renamed as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri in 1955.

**ANSWER WRITTING**

**Q. Discuss the evolution of Khalistan separatism in the post-independence period. What are the various reasons behind the renewal of Khalistan movement in Punjab in the recent times?**

Separatism refers to the ideas or activities advocating the separation of a group or a territorial unit from a country. The Khalistan movement is a fight for a separate, sovereign Sikh state in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan). The first explicit call for Khalistan was made in the 1940s. Over the years, the Khalistan movement has continued in various forms, at different locations, and within different populations.

Evolution of Khalistan separatism in the post-independence period:

- Independence and partition:
  - The origins of the movement have been traced back to India's independence and subsequent Partition along religious lines.
  - Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh Empire, went to Pakistan. Furthermore, the holy Sikh sites, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak, Nankana Sahib, went to Pakistan.
- Akali dal and Punjab Suba Movement: Following the 1947 independence of India, the Punjabi Suba movement, led by the Akali Dal, sought the creation of a province for the Punjabi people.
  - The States Reorganisation Commission, in its 1955 report, rejected this demand, but in 1966, after years of protest, the state of Punjab was reorganised to reflect the Punjabi Suba demand.
- Anandpur Sahib resolution and demand for autonomy: As Punjab and Haryana shared the capital of Chandigarh, resentment was felt among Sikhs in Punjab. Anandpur Sahib resolution was put forward in 1973 to demand radical devolution of power.
  - It demanded autonomy for the state of Punjab and identified regions that would be part of a separate state, and sought the right to frame its own internal constitution.
- Rise of extremist elements and armed insurgency: In the 1980s, the leadership of the movement passed from the moderate Akalis to the extremist elements and took the form of armed insurgency.
- Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder: In 1984, the Government of India carried out 'Operation Blue Star', against the militants hiding in the golden temple. Similarly, operation Black thunder was also aimed at flushing out remaining pro-Khalistan militants.

Reasons for renewal of Khalistan movement in Punjab:

- Role of Diaspora: Operation Blue Star and its violent aftermaths popularised the demand for Khalistan among many Sikhs dispersed globally. Since then, Sikh diaspora provides the diplomatic and financial support. Sikhs in UK, Canada and USA arrange for cadres to travel to Pakistan for military and financial assistance.
- Role of Pakistan: The principal role played by Pakistan has been in providing a base or a safe haven for wanted terrorists. Pakistan's ISI is using a double strategy of tapping into the Jammu & Kashmir terror network to revive the Khalistan movement in Punjab.
- Role of social media: The present propagation of ideas related to Khalistan is mainly done through social media. Many organisations, such as Babbar Khalsa International, run misinformation campaigns on social media through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.
- Misuse of Kartarpur corridor: Pakistan is facilitating and promoting the exchange of pro-Khalistan thoughts among pilgrims visiting Pakistan through the Kartarpur Corridor. Indian intelligence agencies have reported that there has been a constant presence of ISI agents along their side of the corridor.
- Gun culture, drugs and radicalisation of youth: Illegal smuggling of guns and drugs through the Pakistan border leads to easy availability of weapons and narcotics to youth. The gangster-terrorist nexus is luring the youth of Punjab due to propaganda on social media.

Therefore, given the present crises in Punjab, there is a need for improving law and order, involving civil society for dealing with the drug problem, ensuring border security, and putting pressure on the international community to tackle terrorism. India should take all the necessary steps to ensure the unity and integrity of the nation..

**MCQs**

1. Consider the following statements in respect of Bharat Ratna and Padma Awards :
  1. Bharat Ratna and Padma Awards are titled under Article 18(1) of 'the Constitution of India.
  2. Padma Awards, which were instituted in the year 1954, were suspended only once.
  3. The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is restricted to a maximum of five in a particular year.
 Which of the above statements are not correct?  
 a) 1 and 2 only    b) 2 and 3 only    c) 1 and 3 only    **d) 1, 2 and 3**
2. Consider the following statements on World Happiness Report, 2023:
  1. It is released by World Bank.
  2. India has improved its rank in 2023.
  3. South Sudan is unhappiest country.
  4. Finland is happiest country for sixth consecutive year.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?  
 a) 1 and 2 only    b) 2 and 3 only    c) 3 and 4 only    **d) 2 and 4 only**
3. Consider the following statements in reference to World Meteorological Day.
  1. It is celebrated on 23 March as World Meteorological Organization was established on that day in 1950.
  2. The organisation comprises 150 members.
  3. It is being observed by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations.
  4. The theme of the 2023 World Meteorological Day was 'Climate and Water'
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
 a) 1, 2 and 3 only    **b) 1 and 3 only**    c) 1, 3 and 4 only    d) 1 and 2 only
4. Consider the following
  1. Land degradation
  2. Depletion of ground water table
  3. Depletion of biodiversity
  4. Environmental pollution
 Which of the above are the ill effects of the green revolution?  
 a) 1 and 2 only    b) 2 and 3 only    c) 3 and 4 only    **d) 1,2,3 and 4**
5. Consider the following Statements with regards to Exercise Cobra Warrior:
  1. It is one of the largest Royal Air Force exercises conducted by the Royal Air force, United Kingdom.
  2. The aim of the exercise is to participate in diverse fighter aircraft engagements and learn from the best practices of various Air Forces.
 Which of the statements given above is/are correct?  
 a) 1 only    b) 2 only    **c) Both 1 and 2**    d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. National Chambal Sanctuary recently seen in news, with reference to it consider the following
  1. The National Chambal Sanctuary is listed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) and is a Ramsar site also.
  2. Chambal River is the natural habitat of Gharials.
 Which of the above statement/s is or are correct?  
 a) 1 only    **b) 2 only**    c) Both 1 and 2    d) Neither 1 nor 2
7. With reference to Paris club Group of creditors consider the following statements
  1. The Paris Club is an informal group of mostly western creditor countries.
  2. The members of the Paris Club are also members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
  3. In the case of Sri Lanka, China, Japan, and India are the largest bilateral creditors, with Japan being a member of the Paris Club.
 Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?  
 a) 1 and 2 only    b) 2 and 3 only    c) 1 and 3 only    **d) 1,2 and 3**
8. With reference to Commission for Control of Interpol's Files (CCF) consider the following
  1. The CCF is a body that ensures that all personal data processed through INTERPOL's channels conforms to the rules of the Organization.
  2. It is a separate body within Interpol that is not under the control of Interpol's secretariat.
 Which of the above statement/s is/are not correct?  
 a) 1 only    b) 2 only    c) Both 1 and 2    **d) Neither 1 nor 2**
9. A term "SAM NO VARUNAH" recently seen in news, is associated with which of the following?
  - a) **A maritime awareness coastal motor car expedition**
  - b) The Maritime trade fair across the Eastern coast of India
  - c) Awareness programme for use of Inland waterways
  - d) Coastal city disaster preparedness programme.
10. The term Ab-CoV often mentioned in news is related to which of the following?
  - a) **Database of coronaviruses' neutralizing antibodies**
  - b) Booster dose vaccine for new variant XBB.1.16
  - c) New oral medicine for COVID-19
  - d) None of the above