



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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PIB

PM-KISAN scheme

Why in news?

Recently PM launched PM-KISAN scheme in Gorakhpur, UP.

About Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM KISAN):

- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN) was announced in the interim Budget 2019-20 on February 1, 2019.
- Under the Scheme, Rs 6,000 will be given per year to small and marginal farmer families having combined land holding/ownership of upto 2 hectares.
- The amount will be given in three installments of Rs.2000 each.
- The amount will be transferred directly to the bank account of beneficiaries through Direct Benefit Transfer. DBT will ensure transparency in the entire process and will save time for the farmers.
- The Scheme was introduced to augment the income of the Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs). It is estimated to benefit more than 12 crore small and marginal farmers.
- The PM-KISAN scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the SMFs in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of the each crop cycle.
- This would also protect them from falling in the clutches of moneylenders for meeting such expenses and ensure their

continuance in the farming activities.

- PM KISAN is a Central Sector scheme with 100% funding from Government of India. The Scheme becomes effective from 1.12.2018 for transfer of benefit to eligible beneficiaries.
 - State Government and UT Administration will identify the farmer families which are eligible for support as per scheme guidelines.
 - PM KISAN is a revolutionary scheme which aims to transform the lives of small and marginal farmers in India, by providing them assured monetary support in three instalments every year.
 - The scheme implemented through DBT, will transfer the amount directly to the bank account of the beneficiary, thereby eliminating middlemen and corruption.
 - As against the onetime loan waivers, PM KISAN is truly an empowering project designed for ensuring dignified life for small scale farmers. In the long run, the scheme is expected to address farmer migration and improve crop intensity.
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Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) constitutes three Working Groups

Why in news?

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has constituted three Working Groups to study and recommend measures to facilitate trade, promote exports and improve compliance.

The Working Groups will focus on:-

- improving the legislative structure of customs tariff and update it to suit the emerging and future needs of the economy and industry. Special focus would be given to create a comprehensive export tariff structure to enhance India's export competitiveness
- export promotion and facilitation with emphasis on boosting exports through e-commerce, addressing the trade facilitation barriers faced

in India's export markets and improving the quality of logistics services for exporters.

- enhancing compliance, plugging loopholes to improve revenue collection on customs and curb IGST refund frauds
- The groups will consult the stakeholders extensively, including the Export Promotion Councils and relevant wings of the Ministry of Commerce and industry.

About CBIC:

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, in the Ministry of Finance, is the apex body for administering the levy and collection of indirect taxes of the Union of India viz. Central Excise duty, Customs duty and Central Goods and Service Tax, IGST, and for facilitating cross border movement of goods & services.

Mission

Mission is to provide an efficient system by:

- Formulating progressive tax policies & processes to enable smooth economic activities.
- Realising revenue in a fair, equitable, transparent and efficient manner.
- Managing cross border movements of goods and people with a view to ensuring safety and security of citizens and economy of the country.
- Facilitating capacity enhancement of all stakeholders to improve compliance.
- Adopting international best practices and promoting bilateral and multilateral international cooperation.
- Investing in human capital to achieve a high level of integrity, competency and commitment.
- Administering goods and services tax across India in harmony with state tax administrators.
- Innovative use of technology & techniques for maximum facilitation and minimal intervention.

- Combating tax evasion & commercial frauds with interventions based on risk assessment using analytics & predictive technology.

Strategy

The strategy for achieving mission shall comprise the following:

- Benchmarking of operations and adopting best practices
- Enhancing the use of information technology
- Streamlining Customs, Central Excise and CGST, IGST procedures by employing modern techniques like risk management, non- intrusive inspections and accredited clients facilitation
- Evolving cooperative initiatives with other government and private agencies and building partnerships with trade, industry and other stakeholders
- Measuring conformance to service delivery standards
- Developing professionalism through capacity building.

Key Functions:

Regulatory Functions

- Levy and collection of Customs and Central Excise duties, CGST & IGST
- Registration and monitoring of units manufacturing excisable goods and service providers
- Receipt and scrutiny of declarations and returns filed with the department
- Prevention of smuggling and combating evasion of duties and service tax
- Enforcement of border control on goods and conveyances
- Assessment, examination and clearance of imported goods and export goods
- Implementation of export promotion measures
- Clearance of international passengers and their baggage
- Resolution of disputes through administrative and legal measures
- Sanction of refund, rebate and drawback
- Realization of arrears of revenue

- Audit of assessments for ensuring tax compliance.

Service Functions

- Dissemination of information on law and procedures through electronic and print media
 - Enabling filing of declarations, returns and claims through online services.
 - Providing information on the status of processing of declarations, returns and claims
 - Assisting the right holders in protecting their intellectual property rights
 - Responding to public enquiries relating to Customs, Central Goods and Service Tax matters
 - Providing Customs services such as examination of goods and factory stuffing of export goods at clients' sites, as per policy.
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National Viral Hepatitis Control Program

Why in news?

In line with the Government of India's deep commitment towards elimination of viral hepatitis, the "National Action Plan - Viral Hepatitis" was launched by Union Minister of State, Health & Family Welfare in Mumbai.

Highlights:

- Viral hepatitis is recognized as an important public health problem across the world. According to WHO estimates, viral hepatitis caused 1.34 million deaths globally in 2015, a number comparable to deaths due to tuberculosis, worldwide.
- In India, it is estimated that there are 4 crore people suffering from Hepatitis B and 0.6-1.2 crore people suffering from Hepatitis C.

- The Plan provides a strategic framework, based on which National Viral Hepatitis Control Program was framed and launched in July, 2018 under National Health Mission by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
- This program is also in line with our global commitment towards achieving Sustainable development Goal (SDG) 3.3. India has affirmed this commitment at the 69th World Health Assembly.
- India is one of the few countries in the world to roll out management of Hepatitis B and hepatitis C in a public health approach and offer free diagnostics and drugs lifelong to its beneficiaries.
- The aim of the program is to combat hepatitis and achieve countrywide elimination of Hepatitis C by 2030, achieve significant reduction in the infected population, morbidity and mortality associated with Hepatitis B and C viz. Cirrhosis and Hepato-cellular carcinoma (liver cancer) and Hepatitis A and E.

About National Viral Hepatitis Control Program (NVHCP)

- The National Viral Hepatitis Control Program has been launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India on the occasion of the World Hepatitis Day, 28th July 2018.
- It is an integrated initiative for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis in India to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.3 which aims to ending viral hepatitis by 2030.
- This is a comprehensive plan covering the entire gamut from Hepatitis A, B, C, D & E, and the whole range from prevention, detection and treatment to mapping treatment outcomes. Operational Guidelines for National Viral Hepatitis Control Program, National Laboratory Guidelines for Viral Hepatitis Testing and National Guidelines for Diagnosis and Management of Viral Hepatitis were also released.

Aim:

- Combat hepatitis and achieve country wide elimination of Hepatitis C by 2030;
- Achieve significant reduction in the infected population, morbidity

- and mortality associated with Hepatitis B and C viz. Cirrhosis and Hepato-cellular carcinoma (liver cancer);
- Reduce the risk, morbidity and mortality due to Hepatitis A and E.

Key Objectives:

- Enhance community awareness on hepatitis and lay stress on preventive measures among general population especially high-risk groups and in hotspots.
- Provide early diagnosis and management of viral hepatitis at all levels of healthcare
- Develop standard diagnostic and treatment protocols for management of viral hepatitis and its complications.
- Strengthen the existing infrastructure facilities, build capacities of existing human resources and raise additional human resources, where required, for providing comprehensive services for management of viral hepatitis and its complications in all districts of the country.
- Develop linkages with the existing National programs towards awareness, prevention, diagnosis and treatment for viral hepatitis.
- Develop a web-based “Viral Hepatitis Information and Management System” to maintain a registry of persons affected with viral hepatitis and its sequelae.

Components:

1. Preventive component:

This is the cornerstone of the NVHCP. It includes

- Awareness generation & behaviour change communication
- Immunization of Hepatitis B (birth dose, high risk groups, health care workers)
- Safety of blood and blood products
- Injection safety, safe socio-cultural practices
- Safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitary toilets

2. *Diagnosis and Treatment:*

- Screening of pregnant women for HBsAg to be done in areas where institutional deliveries are < 80% to ensure their referral for institutional delivery for birth dose Hepatitis B vaccination.
- Free screening, diagnosis and treatment for both hepatitis B and C would be made available at all levels of health care in a phased manner.
- Provision of linkages, including with private sector and not for profit institutions, for diagnosis and treatment.
- Engagement with community/peer support to enhance and ensure adherence to treatment and demand generation.

3. *Monitoring and Evaluation, Surveillance and Research*

Effective linkages to the surveillance system would be established and operational research would be undertaken through Department of Health Research (DHR). Standardised monitoring & evaluation framework would be developed and an online web based system is established.

4. *Training and Capacity Building:*

- This will be a continuous process and will be supported by NCDC (National Centre for Disease Control), ILBS (Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences) and state tertiary care institutes and coordinated by NVHCP.
- The hepatitis induction and update programs for all level of health care workers would be made available using both, the traditional cascade model of training through master trainers and various platforms available for enabling electronic, e-learning and e-courses.

Indian Express

What is the PRC protest in Arunachal Pradesh?

Why in news?

Aftermath of amid violence, The Arunachal government passed an order rejecting the recommendations of the Joint High-Powered Committee to grant permanent resident certificates to six tribal communities.

What is permanent resident certificate?

Permanent resident certificate is a legal document issued to Indian citizens that serves as evidence of residence and is required to be submitted as residential proof for official purpose.

What has the state government proposed?

- Government in the state is considering issuing the certificate to the six non-APSTs communities living in Namsai and Changlang districts and to the Gorkhas living in Vijaynagar.
- Amongst those communities are Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Morans, Adivasis and Mishings. Most of these communities are recognised as Scheduled Tribes in neighbouring Assam.
- A Joint High Power Committee (JHPC), after holding discussions with the stakeholders, recommended granting PRC to the six communities, who are not natives of Arunachal Pradesh but have been living in Namsai and Changlang districts for decades.

Why are people in Arunachal protesting against PRC?

There is resentment among several community-based groups and organisations in Arunachal Pradesh, who feel the rights and interests of indigenous people will be compromised if the proposal is implemented.

THE HINDU

Forest fire in Bandipur national park:

Why in news?

A raging wild fire, which started about four days ago, has destroyed more than 10,000 acres of forest in the Bandipur national park. Though the major fire has been brought under control, some patches continue to burn. The fire has also spread to Mudumalai forest range in Tamil Nadu, causing damage in around 40 acres.

Tourism activities halted:

- The safari was suspended following the outbreak of fire near the tourism zone and the reception area in the Bandipur range.
- Movement of vehicles on the national highway connecting Mysuru and Ooty, and cutting through the national park, was severely affected.

Satellite information:

- An alert from NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System (**NASA-FIRMS**) said that 21 fires or hotspots were detected during the satellite overpass and processed by it on Saturday.
- Forest fires have been reported in recent days in **Kundakere and surrounding areas**.
- The authorities have pegged the extent of damage to around 60 acres. But Saturday's fire is reckoned to be the biggest and the damage is feared to be extensive.
- The authorities suspended bus services to **Gopalaswamy Betta**, which draws a large number of visitors on weekends and holidays, and traffic continued to pile up at the Melkamanahalli Gate.
- The vehicles lined up from Melkamanahalli, which is the check-post from where the boundary of the tiger reserve commences, and people witnessed dramatic scenes of billowing smoke enveloping the area in the backdrop of raging flames.

Sporadic fires:

- Though there had been sporadic fires in different sections of the national park, they were relatively minor.
- According to officials, the **blazing fire was being fanned by high winds** and dousing the flames was a challenge.

- Gundre, Begur, Molyuru, and Kundgere are fire-prone ranges and, in addition to nearly 300 watchers, 130 forest guards on probationary training have been deployed.
- The authorities had fears of intense fire this year as heavy rains during monsoon had led to **luxurious growth of vegetation**. But given the nature of the national park, a bulk of which is **dry deciduous** in nature, it was feared that the dry wood coupled with **lantana**, which covers over 50% of the **forests**, had turned the forest into a tinderbox where a small spark could trigger a massive fire.
- The adjoining **Nagarahole** is bone dry and the authorities doused a minor ground fire at Solepura in the territorial range as they feared it could spread.

Forest Fires in India:

- With at least one in four people dependent on forests for their livelihood, India is losing at least ₹ 1,100 crore due to forest fires every year, says a new World Bank report.
- The report, Strengthening Forest Fire Management in India, jointly prepared by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) and the World Bank.
- Forest fires occur in around half of the country's 647 districts every year. However, repeated fires in short succession are reducing diversity of species and harming natural regeneration, while posing a risk to over 92 million in India who live in areas of forest cover, said the report.
- Analysing patterns and trends of forest fires in India, the report highlights that central India has the largest area affected by fire. The region, which has the highest forest cover in India after North-East, accounts for 56% of burnt forest land during 2003-2016, followed by southern states and the North-East.
- However, North-eastern states account for the biggest share of fire detections, with at least 55% of fire incidents reported during 2003-2016. The report calls for a national plan for the prevention of forest fire.
- The findings are significant since preventing forest fires is crucial to meet Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in order to limit global warming. As per the Fifth Assessment Report of IPCC, forest fires globally contribute 2.5 billion to 4.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ to

carbon emissions every year.

- Tackling forest fires is even more important in India as the country has committed to bringing 33% of its geographical area under forest cover by 2030, as part of its Nationally Determined Goals (NDC) and increases its forest cover by 5 million hectares, as part of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change.

Recommendations of the Parliamentary standing Committee on forest fires:

- The committee recommended the framing of a national policy to manage forest fires.
 - It also suggested clearing the forests of Chir pine needles, as according to the report the inflammable needles play a huge role in the spread of forest fires.
 - To ensure the same, the report suggested the use of sweeping machines to clear Chir pine needles from the roadside. The report also suggested alternative usage of pine such as fuel.
 - Apart from this, the committee has also suggested the replacement of pine reserve forest areas with broad leaf plants.
 - It has also observed that there are a number of front line forest staff posts that are lying vacant.
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Aerial surveillance system

Why in news:

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has commissioned the development of an aerial surveillance system for **monitoring suspicious moments under dense foliage cover along the international border** and some parts within the country.

About the Programme:

- This **hyper spectral imagery programme**, a first for the country, seeks to locate and identify suspicious movements and is expected to

be operational in the next two years.

- What the programme would mean is that the **data gathered from aerial sources would be processed within minutes**, and researchers would be able to tell security forces on the ground of **“unwanted” human presence in the area**, their numbers and locations, among other inputs.
- The IAF is spending 13 crore for the programme in which human resources from premier research and education institutions across the country are being put together, and has roped in a senior researcher and lead technologist of Indian origin from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as the chief technologist for the programme.
- For the first time, IAF will be having multi-sensor data fusion that will help identify an adversary. They have a mandate to change the way we fight the war. The IAF is willing to wait for a couple of years to reap the benefits.
- The IAF, which had tracked the work of Houston-based senior scientist Kumar Krishen’s work for nearly three years, finally roped him in after he quit NASA in September 2018.

Methods in place:

- Data/images will be **captured through optical and infra red sensors** to be most likely mounted on an unmanned aerial vehicle and processed through deep learning algorithms.
- The methods are in place while they were working on handling data and tuning up the algorithm.

India to push for UN ban on JeM chief

Why in news?

With both the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and Paris-based Financial Action Task Force issuing strong statements on the February 14 Pulwama terror attack and calling on Pakistan to act against the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), diplomats in Delhi and New York say they have begun negotiations on a new proposal to place JeM chief Masood

Azhar on the ban list operated by the **UNSC's 1267 committee**, the fourth such request in four consecutive years.

Recent Developments:

- The effort, being coordinated by France among its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the embassy in Delhi and the U.N. mission in New York, is likely to take some weeks.
- In March, by coincidence, France will also take over the presidency of the UNSC, which comprises 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members.
- The most important meeting in this regard will come on February 27, when Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj meets Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi.

Beijing's stance:

- **Beijing has vetoed all the past three attempts to list Azhar: in 2016 and the subsequent two years.**
- **Ms. Swaraj is expected to meet Mr. Wang for the trilateral meeting of Russia-India-China (RIC) Foreign Ministers along with Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in Wuzhen, and then will meet both bilaterally.**
- **It will be critical to see what role Russia plays in this effort, not just on supporting India, but on actively convincing China to withdraw its objections to the listing.**
- China agreed to the UNSC press statement that named the JeM after considerable wrangling over the wording, particularly insisting on leaving out any direct reference to Pakistan in it and objecting to any "political statements,"
- At one point, talks nearly broke down with the U.S. and China at loggerheads, and the French delegation went in to forge an agreement on a carefully worded statement that would send a "strong signal" to Pakistan.
- The extent of the disagreement was evident from the relatively much quicker response from the UNSC to a similar attack which killed 27 Iranian soldiers in Sistan, Baluchistan on February 13, a day before

the Pulwama attack.

- Despite the U.S.'s other issues with Iran, the UNSC was able to issue its statement on February 14, while the statement on Pulwama came a week later, on February 21.

Foreign Secretary to meet Ambassadors:

- Meanwhile, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale is coordinating the diplomatic pressure India hopes to build on Pakistan in the coming weeks by meeting focused groups of Ambassadors from different regions with specific lists of expectations from each.
 - In particular, officials said the **European Union (EU) is being asked to add Pakistan to its own 'black list'** and to conduct a serious review of the GSP+ (**Generalised System of Preferences**) status if it fails to crack down on the groups targeting India, particularly the JeM and the Lashkar-e-Taiba.
 - At present the **EU had put only DPRK or North Korea on its black list**. For the moment, however, the Azhar listing is top priority for the government, and the need to convince China to turn its vote against him high on the diplomatic agenda.
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SC orders eviction forest dwellers

Why in news:

In a significant development for tribals living in forests, the Supreme Court has asked 17 state governments to evict close to one million in forest areas, after their claim has been rejected in its Feb 13 judgment.

About the judgment:

- The top court rejected their claims on various grounds including **lack of proof that tribals were in possession of land for at least three generations**. As per the law, only those living in forests areas

for at least three generations before December 31, 2005, are eligible for land rights. The law has been slammed by a number of wildlife activists as well as those fighting for rights of tribals.

- States like, **Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha** are the biggest losers. These three states have the highest numbers, with 20 per cent claiming land ownership submitted under **the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**.
- It was during the previous government, that the law was enacted to undo the injustice done to those living in forests under **Indian Forest Act, 1927**, that termed them “**encroachers**” on the land they were tilling for a number of generations.
 - **The Supreme Court has issued directions to chief secretaries of 17 states to ensure that cases where land ownership been rejected, the eviction is done till next date of hearing next date of hearing, which is July 12.**

Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:

- **To address the adverse living conditions of many tribal families living in forests was on account of non-recognition and vesting of pre-existing rights, a landmark legislation viz. Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, has been enacted to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation of forest land in forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, who have been residing in such forests for generations, but whose rights could not be recorded.**
- **This Act not only recognizes the rights to hold and live in the forest land under the individual or common occupation for habitation or for self-cultivation for livelihood, but also grants several other rights to ensure their control over forest resources which, inter-alia, include right of ownership, access to collect, use and dispose of minor forest produce, community rights such as nistar; habitat rights for primitive**

tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities; right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.

- The Act also provides for diversion of forest land for public utility facilities managed by the Government, such as schools, dispensaries, fair price shops, electricity and telecommunication lines, water tanks, etc. with the recommendation of Gram Sabhas.

- In addition, several schemes have been implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for the benefit of tribal people, including those in the forest areas such as "Mechanism for marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and development of Value Chain for MFP".

- Funds are released out of Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Plan for infrastructure work relating to basic services and facilities viz. approach roads, healthcare, primary education, minor irrigation, rainwater harvesting, drinking water, sanitation, community halls, etc. for development of forest villages.

India's housing project in Sri Lanka

Why in news?

As many as 155 houses, build as part of India's ongoing housing project in **Sri Lanka**, were handed over to estate workers in **Hatton**, located in the Central Province.

About the Project:

- The effort is part of India's pledge to help construct **63,000 houses**

in Sri Lanka including 46,000 homes built in the war-hit north and east with a grant of \$350 million, the largest Indian grant assistance project in any country abroad.

- The houses have come up at a cost of about LKR 10 lakh each (roughly ₹4 lakh). Of the 14,000 houses coming up in the hill country with Indian aid, 1,000 have been completed, 3,000 are under construction and work on the remaining are expected to commence soon.
 - The newly-constructed houses will enable families of estate workers to move out of the cramped, colonial-era line rooms, into individual units
 - Thousands of Malayaha Tamils, whose ancestors the British brought down from South India to the plantations in Central and Southern Sri Lanka, continue to toil in the tea estates, under rather exploitative conditions.
 - The workers help Sri Lanka earn crucial foreign exchange, but their own housing, sanitation, education and health needs remain largely neglected.
 - They are currently campaigning for a basic wage of LKR 1,000 (roughly ₹ 400). After several rounds of negotiations, their employers recently agreed to pay them LKR 800.
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Pollution and NCD's in India

What is the issue?

The World Bank estimates that more than a fifth of all communicable diseases in India (21%) are caused by contaminated water. It attributes one in ten deaths in India to diseases or infections directly or indirectly transmitted through water. Over 500 children die every day in India due to diarrhoeal diseases.

Nitrogen, a growing pollutant:

- According to a study by the **Indian Nitrogen Group**, a task force of scientists tracking the issue, the amount of reactive nitrogen in a bulk

of the water bodies in India is already twice the limit prescribed by WHO.

- Nitrogen pollution from untreated sewage, the study found, now outstrips nitrogen pollution from the Indian farmer's urea addiction.
- Government has managed to make toilets top of the mind in our country, with his Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- Toilets are being built in mission mode and there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that there has been a measurable reduction in the number of people defecating in the open, which stood at over 500 million or half the population a few years ago.

Clean India missions:

- Ironically, India's latest, largest and most significantly scaled attempt at cleanliness the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is likely to add to this problem.
- Under the mission, in the past four years alone, over nine crore toilets have been constructed. Of these, only 60 lakh are in urban areas, where one assumes they are connected to some sort of sewage system, even this assumption is a stretch.
- A study done by the Centre for Science and Environment in 30 cities in Uttar Pradesh found that only 28% of toilets in these cities were connected to a sewage system.
- The rest will be generating fecal sludge, sewage and septage which has no place to go.
- Which means that that too will simply get dumped, polluting land, surface and ground water and killing our rivers and ponds.
- According to **the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), 63% of urban sewage flowing into rivers is untreated.** The CPCB's website admits that the gap between sewage generated in urban areas (all Class 1 and Class 2 towns) and capacity for treating that is over 78%.

Weak sewage treatment capacity:

- Up to a third of the installed sewage treatment capacity is fully or partly dysfunctional. Even where the plants are working, many are not working at full capacity, because the infrastructure needed to feed the raw sewage into the treatment plant a network of drains, sewers and pumping stations is inadequate or incomplete.

- All this, one would have presumed, prodded policymakers and governments into action.
- Just like the nation is building toilets in mission mode, one would have thought civic administrations would be building drains and sewers and treatment plants with the same zeal.
- One would have presumed wrong. Even though it is arguably one of the major health hazards faced by the in cities, in particular sewage and human **waste** is simply not on the agenda.
- 99 cities in the 'Smart Cities' mission, which are collectively spending ₹2 lakh crore over five years (from 2015), only 2.4% of the money is going to be spent on waste management.
- Even storm water drainage (which only removes short-term excess water during heavy downpours and doesn't really add to waste management) gets a higher share of 2.5%!
- Of course, other schemes like the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) also fund such schemes. AMRUT covers a much larger spread 500 so-called 'mission cities' across the country.
- Of these, only 217 pitched for a sewage treatment plant as an AMRUT project. Of these, in the last four years, only four have been completed, according to a reply filed in the Lok Sabha.
- Even these numbers are misleading. Of the 212 schemes, as many as 189 are accounted for by just Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Only six other States have one or more projects under way. The rest have no plans.

Access to water:

- This, despite the fact that water is increasingly becoming the biggest challenge faced by most Indian cities today.
- According to **NITI Aayog's composite water management index report** released last year, 75% of households do not have access to drinking water on premises, 70% households lack piped water (potable or otherwise) and as many as 20 cities will effectively use up all available water resources by 2020.

Way forward:

Sewage and waste need to come centre-stage in our policy debates. Elections may be fought on 'bijli, sadak, paani' (power, roads, water) but

no election is fought over naali (drain). Unless that happens, we run the real risk of eventually either choking or being poisoned by our own waste.



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