

# CROSS & CLIMB ROHTAK

## Current Affairs : 18 November 2023

### PRADHAN MANTRI KISAN SAMMAN NIDHI (PM-KISAN) YOJANA

The Prime Minister recently distributed the 15th installment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Yojana, totalling over Rs 18,000 crore and benefiting more than 80 million farmers.



#### About PM-KISAN:

- It is a Central-Sector scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India.
- **Objective:** The scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income.
- It has become operational from 1.12.2018.
- Under the scheme, income support of 6,000/- per year in three equal installments will be provided to all land-holding farmer families.
- The definition of family for the scheme is husband, wife, and minor children.
- The State Government and UT administration will identify the farmer families that are eligible for support as per scheme guidelines.
- The fund will be directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

**Exclusion Categories:** The following categories of beneficiaries shall not be eligible for benefits under the scheme:

- All institutional landholders.
- Farmer families that belong to one or more of the following categories:
  - Former and present holders of constitutional posts.
  - Former and present Ministers/ State Ministers, and former/present Members of Lok Sabha/ Rajya Sabha/ State Legislative Assemblies/ State Legislative Councils, former and present Mayors of Municipal Corporations, former and present Chairpersons of District Panchayats.

- All serving or retired officers and employees of Central/ State Government Ministries /Offices/Departments and its field units Central or State PSEs and Attached offices /Autonomous Institutions under Government as well as regular employees of the Local Bodies (Excluding Multi Tasking Staff /Class IV/Group D employees).
- All superannuated/retired pensioners whose monthly pension is Rs.10,000/-or more (Excluding Multi Tasking Staff / Class IV/Group D employees) of above category.
- All Persons who paid Income Tax in the last assessment year.
- Professionals like Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Chartered Accountants, and Architects registered with Professional bodies and carrying out profession by undertaking practices.

## WHAT IS CHHATH PUJA?

The great festival of Chhath started recently and is celebrated with great rituals and devotion.



### About Chhath Puja:

- It is an important Hindu festival celebrated in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.
- This festival is dedicated to God Surya and his sister Shashti Devi, often referred to as Chhathi Maiya, and it involves religious rituals.
- The most unique feature of this Chhath Puja is that there is no Murti Pujan or Idol Worshipping, unlike most of the festivals of the Hindu religion.
- The festival is celebrated in October or November, after Diwali.
- The Chhath festival begins as the Diwali festival ends.
- It is celebrated for four consecutive days and is celebrated with great reverence and dedication.
- The first day of the Chhath Puja includes taking a dip in the holy river/any water body. People also take the Ganges water to their homes to perform special offerings and rituals. Houses are thoroughly cleaned on this day.
- The second day of Chhath, also known as Kharna, involves devotees observing a day-long fast, which is broken in the late evening after performing the worship of Mother Earth. The

offerings to God include rice pudding (kheer) and fruits, which is distributed among family members and friends.

- The **third day** of Chhath goes into the preparation of the prasad (offerings) for the evening offerings, also known as Sanjhiya Arghya. In the evening, large numbers of devotees gather on the banks of rivers and make offerings (Arghya) to the setting sun. The night of the third day witnesses a colourful event known as Kosi. A canopy is made from sugarcane sticks, and lighted earthen lamps are placed inside the canopy along with baskets filled with prasad.
- On the fourth and final day of Chhath, family members and friends go to the banks of rivers before sunrise and make offerings (Arghya) to the rising sun. After this ritual, devotees break their fast and distribute Prasad to neighbours and relatives.

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## PROPOSED INDIA-UK FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)

### Why in News?

- The External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India discussed the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Britain's PM and Foreign Secretary.
- This round of talks comes amid the bilateral trade between India and the U.K. increased to \$20.36 billion in 2022-23 from \$17.5 billion in 2021-22.

### Significance of the India-UK FTA:

- When signed, the India-UK FTA will serve as a template for an agreement with India's 2nd-largest trade partner, the European Union (EU).
- Breaking from the look east policy for trade deals that saw widening deficits with Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries, the government is counting on economic integration with Western and African nations to fuel export growth.

### What has Spurred the India-UK FTA?

- The China factor:

- The disruption of supply chains during the pandemic brought home to Western companies the risks of over-dependence on China, and the need for a **‘China-plus one’ policy**.
- Australia’s tensions with China, along with the complementarities with the Indian economy, presented a case for a trade deal with India; **similar factors brought New Delhi and London to the negotiating table**.
- **India exiting from Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):** India, after exiting the China-dominated RCEP, has been looking at trade deals with the UK, Australia, the EU, to hold off China in the region.
- **Spurred by Brexit:** A trade deal with India is crucial for the UK as the ruling Conservatives face a tough election in early 2025.

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## BRANDED, GENERIC AND THE MISSING INGREDIENT OF QUALITY

### Context

- Recently, **National Medical Commission (NMC) issued a notification asking registered medical practitioners (RMP) to prescribe generic medicines only** which led to protests by IMA (Indian Medical Association) and **subsequently NMC suspended its notification**.
- The withdrawal of the generic prescribing order reflects ongoing complexities in achieving universal healthcare goals and **it is important to reflect on challenges in India’s healthcare system, the struggle between generic and brand prescriptions**.

### Categories of Drugs Being Sold in India

- **Branded Under-Patent Drugs**
  - Drugs that are developed and marketed by a pharmaceutical company. They are given a brand name by the company, and **they are often protected by a patent**.
  - When a pharmaceutical company discovers a new drug, they can apply for a patent.
  - **A patent gives the company the exclusive right to manufacture and sell the drug** for a certain period. During this time, no other company can produce and sell the same drug.
- **Branded Generic**

- A branded generic drug is one which has come off patent and is manufactured by drug companies and sold under different companies' brand names.
- These drugs may be less costly than the branded patent version but costlier than the bulk-manufactured generic version of the drugs.
- **Generic Drugs**
- **Generic drugs have the same active ingredients** as their brand-name counterparts. **The active ingredient** is the chemical substance responsible for the therapeutic effect of the drug.
- Generic drugs are **typically less expensive than brand-name drugs but generic drugs must meet the same quality and safety standards** as brand-name drugs.
- To be approved, a **generic drug must demonstrate bioequivalence to the brand-name drug.**
- **This means that the generic version must have the same rate and extent of absorption as the brand-name drug.**
- **Often it is said that the cost difference is because generic manufacturers do not have the same research and development costs as the original drug company.**

## Challenges Associated with Generic Medicines

- **Restriction on Doctor's Freedom**
- In India, a salesperson holds the authority to choose the brand of generic medicine for a patient.
- Doctors are **restricted from endorsing specific brands in which s/he has invested his faith in terms of quality.**
- **False Marketing by Big Pharma Against Generic Medicines**
- **The Hathi Committee's 1975 recommendation sought the gradual elimination of brand names.**
- And the belief that only renowned brands guarantee quality is debunked, **exposing the influence of big pharma companies with their costly propaganda.**
- **Ethical Concerns**
- There is a **connection between pharmaceutical companies and doctors**, leading to unethical marketing practices and kick-backs.

- In contrast, medical associations, including the IMA, emphasise their ethical commitment to improving patient access to affordable medicines.
- **Lack of Quality Assurance and Accountability:** A doctor's reputation relies on the reliability of active pharmaceutical ingredients, yet it is not clear who will ensure compliance with quality parameters.

### How Should the Government Address these Challenges?

- **Ensure No Compromise on Quality**
- **Ensure Implementation of Periodic Testing Earnestly**
- **Study and Replicate Tamil Nadu's Practice**
  - In TN all supplied medicines are kept under quarantine stock till double blinded samples are cleared in quality testing by government and private sector laboratories.
  - This practice by TN Medical Services Corporation Limited is worth replicating. It is only on receipt of a pass quality test report that stock entry is done.
- **Allow Doctors to Prescribe Generic Medicine with Brand Name**
- **Ensure the Availability Rate of All Essential Medicines above 90%**
- **Expand Janaushadhi Kendras and Effective Implementation of Policies**
- **Regulate Profit Margins**
  - **Approved norms of the profit margin for wholesale agents must be limited to 15%.**
  - **For retailers it must be 35%** over the ex-factory or manufacturer's selling prices (MSP) excluding transportation cost and VAT.

### Conclusion

- Following the IMA's protest, the NMC has withdrawn the order on generic prescribing. But this is only a case of **one step forward but two steps back in moving to the goal of universal access to affordable generic medicines** for all without brand names.
- The government needs to bring in reform to address the challenges related to generic medicine because **without these comprehensive measures, accessibility to cheaper medicines in India will be a mirage.**



## WHAT IS EPILEPSY?

National Epilepsy Day is celebrated every year in India on November 17 to raise awareness about the brain disorder and bust myths surrounding the disease.



### About Epilepsy:

- It is a **brain disease** where **nerve cells don't signal properly**, which **causes seizures**.
- A **seizure** is usually defined as a sudden alteration of behaviour **due to a temporary change in the electrical functioning of the brain**.
- Normally, the brain continuously generates tiny electrical impulses in an orderly pattern. These impulses travel along neurons—the network of nerve cells in the brain—and throughout the whole body via chemical messengers called neurotransmitters.
- **In epilepsy, the brain's electrical rhythms have a tendency to become imbalanced, resulting in recurrent seizures.**
- In patients with seizures, the normal electrical pattern is disrupted by sudden and synchronized bursts of electrical energy that may briefly **affect their consciousness, movements, or sensations**.

Examples of conditions that can lead to epilepsy **include:**

- **Brain tumours**
- **Head trauma**
- **Alcoholism** or alcohol withdrawal
- **Alzheimer's disease**
- **Strokes, heart attacks**, and other conditions that deprive the brain of oxygen
- **Abnormal blood vessel formation** (called arteriovenous malformations) or bleeding in the brain
- **Brain inflammation** or swelling
- **Infections** such as meningitis, HIV-related infections, and viral encephalitis
- Nearly **80% of people with epilepsy live in low- and middle-income countries**.

## THE NEW FLARE-UP IN MYANMAR

### Why in news?

- The Ministry of External Affairs has expressed deep concern over the ongoing fighting in the Rikhawdar area in Myanmar's Chin State.
- The area is close to the border with India opposite Zowkhathar in Mizoram.
- This fighting has led to Myanmarese nationals crossing to the Indian side.



### Background

- Myanmar has been in flames ever since the military seized power on February 1, 2021.
- On this day the new parliament elected after the November 2020 elections was to convene.
- Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have joined armed civilian groups called People's Defence Forces (PDFs) to take on the military.
- These groups have allied with the country's self-declared National Unity Government in exile.
- The resistance forces have captured two towns close to the India-Myanmar border after fierce fighting.
- The fall of the latter, Rikhawdar, has resulted in the influx of some 5,000 refugees into Mizoram.

### What does this situation mean for India?

- **Creating a balance**
  - India has so far walked a fine line between expressing concern at the interruption of democracy in Myanmar, and engaging with the junta to protect its vital interests.
- **Immediate concern for India**
  - The influx of Myanmarese nationals in the border states of the Northeast.
  - This too at a time when the situation in Manipur remains volatile.
- **Capturing of two important towns by rebels**
  - The anti-junta forces have captured two important towns close to the only two border crossing points between Myanmar and India. These are:



- Rikhawdar, close to Zokhawthar in Mizoram, and
  - Khampat in Sagaing region, around 60 km from Moreh in Manipur.
  - The latter (Khampat in Sagaing region) is also part of the proposed India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway project.
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## DWARF PLANET ERIS

Scientists are gaining a fuller understanding of Eris and its differences with Pluto.



### About Dwarf Planet Eris:

- It was discovered on January 5, 2005.
- It is named after the ancient **Greek goddess of discord.**
- It is a member of a group of objects that orbit in a disc-like zone **beyond the orbit of Neptune called the Kuiper Belt.**
- It appears to have a **rocky interior below a shell of ice.**
- It has about **25% more mass than Pluto.**
- Eris orbits at an average of **about 68 times further from the sun** than Earth, taking 557 years to complete one orbit.
- It completes one rotation every 25.9 hours, making its day length similar to ours.
- It has a very small **moon called Dysnomia**, which has a nearly circular orbit lasting about 16 days.
- **Atmosphere:**
  - The dwarf planet is often so far from the Sun that its atmosphere collapses and freezes, falling to the surface as snow.
  - As it gets closer to the Sun in its faraway orbit, the atmosphere thaws.

### What is a Dwarf Planet?

- It is a celestial body **that -orbits the sun**, has enough mass to assume a nearly round shape, **has not cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit**, and is not a moon.
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