JAL JEEVAN MISSION

A recent modelling study by the World Health Organization (WHO) and commissioned by the Jal Shakti Ministry reported that the Jal Jeevan Mission would succeed in averting close to 4,00,000 deaths from diarrhoea.

About the Jal Jeevan Mission:

- It is envisioned to provide **safe and adequate drinking water** through individual household tap connections **by 2024 to all households in rural India.**

- It is based on a **community approach** to water and will include extensive Information, Education and communication as a key component of the mission.

- **Nodal Ministry**: Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation under the **Jal Shakti Mantralaya.**

- **Strategy:**

  o This Mission focuses on **integrated demand and supply side management** of water at the local level, including creation of local infrastructure for source sustainability like rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge and management of household wastewater for reuse in agriculture.

  o The Mission will **converge with** other **Central and State Government Schemes** to achieve its objectives of sustainable water supply management across the country.

- **Funding Pattern:**

  o **50:50** between **Centre and States**

  o 90:10 for Himalayan and North-Eastern States.

  o In case of **UTs**, **100% funding** is provided by the Central government.

WHAT ARE PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL CREDIT SOCIETIES (PACS)?

The Cooperation Ministry recently said that the Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) can also be employed as drone entrepreneurs for spraying fertilisers and pesticides.

About Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS):

- These are **village-level cooperative credit societies** that serve as the **last link in a three-tier cooperative credit structure.**
- These are **headed by the State Cooperative Banks (SCB) at the state level.**
- **Credit from the SCBs is transferred to the district central cooperative banks**, or **DCCBs**, that operate at the district level.
- These **DCCBs work with PACS**, **which deals directly with farmers.**
- **Individual farmers are members of the PACS**, and **office-bearers are elected from within them.** A village can have multiple PACS.
- The **main function** of the PACS is to **provide short and medium-term purpose loans to its members.**
- **Other functions include:**
  o **Supplying of agricultural inputs** including seeds, fertilisers, insecticides, etc.
  o **Maintaining the supply of the light machinery** for the agricultural purpose.
  o **Providing marketing facilities** that could enhance the sale of their agricultural products.
  o **Promote savings habits** among its members.

AI GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY: WHY AI MUST BE REGULATED

Context

- As Artificial Intelligence (AI) impacts our everyday lives, there has been a lot of discussion about how this exciting yet powerful and potentially problematic **technology should be regulated.**
- Recently, Sam Altman (CEO of OpenAI, which developed ChatGPT) emphasised the importance of **international cooperation on issues such as AI licensing and auditing.**

What is AI?

- AI is **an emerging technology** that facilitates **intelligence and human capabilities of sense, comprehend, and act with the use of machines.**
  o **For example**, Siriis a human-like reasoning displayed by computer systems.

- **Applications of AI** include natural language processing, speech recognition, machine vision and expert systems. Examples include manufacturing robots, self-driving cars, marketing chat bots, etc.

  Concerns and the Need for AI Regulations

- Three **major concerns** as to why there should be international cooperation regarding the regulation of AI.

  o First, that AI could **go wrong**. ChatGPT, for instance, often gives inaccurate or wrong answers to queries.

  o Second, thatAI will replace some jobs leading to **layoffs** in certain.

  o Finally, AI could be used to spread targeted **misinformation**. The misinformation could influence the country elections.

- AI poses **a risk to human linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical systems** and has the **potential to change the way war is waged**.

  o For instance, the war in Ukraine has accelerated the deployment of drones that "will be used to identify, select and attack targets without help from humans" powered by AI.

  o Whether fully autonomous killer drones will be programmed to work according to the **Geneva Conventions** that prohibit the targeting of civilians and non-combatants is an important concern.

  o At present, drones still require a human to choose targets over a live video feed.**AI may soon change this – enabling AI to pickits own target.**

- Highlighting the concern over AI a statement **"mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war"** was signed.

- Subsequently, AI experts and tech giants signed a letter **to temporarily stop training systems more powerful than GPT-4 -** the technology released by a Microsoft-backed startup.

  Sam Altman's Suggestions to Regulate AI

- He suggested various **regulatory thresholds** based on "how much compute goes into a model."

- **A model** that can "persuade, manipulate and influence a person's beliefs will be one threshold."

- **A model** that can "create novel biological agents" is another threshold.

- He suggests that each capability threshold ought to have a different level or regulation and that models of low capability should be kept as open-use.

Steps Taken on International level

- In February**, the US launched an initiative** to promote international cooperation on the responsible use of AI and autonomous weapons by militaries.

- Several forums such as the **US-EU Trade and Technology Council** (TTC), the Global Partnership in AI (**GPAI**), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**) are deliberating on the regulations of AI.

- **The recent G-7 Leaders Communiqué** also underscored the need for cooperation on AI, including on the impact of LLMs such as ChatGPT.

- **Italy** became the first Western country to ban ChatGPT out of privacy concerns, the EUis bringing in the AI Act this year, the US government released a blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights.

Steps Taken by India

- The Indian government has taken a **proactive stance on technology, particularly AI,** intending to position India as a global leader in the field.

- The Indian government sees AI as a '**kinetic enabler'**and wants to harness its potential for better governance.

- The government is harnessing the potential of AI to provide personalised and interactive citizen-centric services through **Digital Public Platforms**.

- According to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology,**India will regulate the AI "through the prism of user harm."**

[HIKE IN MSP FOR KHARIF CROPS](#)

Why in news?

- India's Union government announced the MSPs (minimum support prices) for 17 crops in this year's Kharif season.

- MSPs play a very significant role not just for India's farmers and the farm economy but also for India's consumers and the kind of food prices they face.

Minimum Support Price (MSP)

- **About**

  o MSP is a form of market intervention (a policy decision not enforceable by law) by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices during bumper production years.

  o Basically, MSPs are support prices announced by the government (and sometimes state governments add a bonus amount to them).

- **Background**

  o In 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri formed the Food Grain Price Committee (under LK Jha), to push for a MSP regime.

  o The first MSP announcement was made in 1967.

  o Later, the government set up the Agricultural Prices Commission (renamed as the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) in 1985) for fixing MSP for crops.

- **Crops Covered**

  o Government announces MSPs for 22 mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (FRP) for sugarcane (total 23).

  o The mandated crops are **14 crops of the kharif** (summer sowing) season**, 6 rabi crops** (Wheat, Barley, Gram, Masur (Lentil), Rapeseed & Mustard, Safflower) and two other commercial crops.

Why do MSPs matter?

- **Safety net for farmers**

  o As a farmer, one is worried each season because one does not know what one's harvest will fetch. Also, a farmer has little bargaining power in the market.

  o If the market prices are below the farmer's cost of production they and their families can be ruined.

  o By announcing MSPs, the government makes a promise that it will buy (called procurement) from farmers at the announced prices.

- **To protect consumers**

- o If one particular crop, say cotton, led to the ruin of many farmers, then farmers will avoid growing cotton next season.
- o This, in turn, will reduce supply and push up prices. Higher prices will then show up across the different products for consumers.
- **To tweak the production pattern**
- o If the government wants to incentivise the production of pulses, as against paddy (rice), then it can give a relatively higher hike in MSP of pulses than the MSPs for paddy.

Does the government actually buy all crops at MSPs?

- It is important to remember that, while the government announces MSPs for a whole host of crops both in the Rabi (winter) and the Kharif (summer) season, it procures only a few of those crops and that too from only a few states.
- According to a CRISIL research report, crops such as paddy, cotton and, to a limited extent, pulses get procured at MSP.
- Only few Kharif crops benefit from government procurement.

Challenges associated with MSPs

- While a sharp rise in MSPs (or higher MSPs over a sustained period) does alleviate farm distress, it can also lead to a spike in food inflation.
- The trade-off between the interests of the farmer, on the one hand, and consumers, on the other, makes deciding MSPs so difficult.
- The political dimension just adds to the complications.

THE POCSO ACT: 'SEXUAL INTENT' IN POCSO, DEFINITION OF OBSCENITY

Why in News?

- Kerala HC recently quashed a case filed under India's child protection law - the POCSO Act, against a woman **accused of subjecting her children to an obscene act.**

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act:

- **About:**

- o It is the **first comprehensive law** in the country dealing specifically with sexual abuse of children, enacted in **2012** and is administered by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

- o It was **intended to protect children from sexual assault**, sexual harassment and pornographic violations, as well as to establish Special Courts for such trials.

- o In **2019**, the Act was amended to strengthen the penalties for specified offences in order to deter abusers and promote a dignified upbringing.

- **Key provisions:**

- o **Gender-neutral legislation:** The Act defines a child as "any person" under the age of 18.

- o **Non-reporting is a crime:** Any person in charge of an institution (excluding children) who fails to report the commission of a sexual offence involving a subordinate faces punishment.

- o **No time limit for reporting abuse:** A victim may report an offence at any time, even years after the abuse has occurred.

- o **Keeping victim's identity confidential:** The Act forbids the disclosure of the victim's identity in any form of media unless authorised by the special courts established by the Act.

- **Concerns:**

- o **Such abuse is on the rise:** Particularly since the Covid-19 outbreak, when new forms of cybercrime have emerged.

- o **Lack of awareness or knowledge:** On the part of minor girls, boys, parents and society as a whole.

The Recent Case:

- In **2020**, a Kerala-based women's rights activist, posted a video on social media that showed her two children (8 and 14), painting on her "semi-nude torso".

- There was outrage, and Police registered a case charging her with offences under **the POCSO Act, 2012.**

- o The offences under the Act **involves sexual assault by a child's relative** and using children for pornographic purposes.

- The police also charged the activist under -

- o **The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000** [for publishing or electronically transmitting obscene material, which depicts children in sexually explicit acts]**,** and
- o **The Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015** [for depicting children in an obscene, indecent, or sexually explicit manner].

Definition of Obscenity:

- **The SC:**
- o In 1996, the top court said that depicting nudity and sexual violence in the film 'Bandit Queen' did not amount to obscenity as it was done to underscore a **social reality.**
- o In 2014, the top court held that a nude picture cannot be called obscene **unless it tends to arouse feelings or reveal an overt sexual desire.**
- **The Kerala HC:**
- o Asserted that "**nudity and obscenity are not always synonymous**", and it was **wrong to consider nudity immoral**.
- o We have murals, statues, and art of deities displayed in ancient temples all over the country, and such paintings are considered artistic and holy.
- o While providing examples of men's body painting traditions during **Puli Kali folk festivals and Theyyam rituals in Kerala**, the court said -
- ▪ "Even though the idols of all Goddesses are bare-chested, when one prays at the temple, **the feeling is not of sexual explicitness but of divinity**."
- o **These are double standards** that allow men to walk around without shirts while women's bodies are "overly sexualised" and construed as something "meant for erotic purposes".

NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY

Recently, the drug price regulator, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), fixed the ceiling price of 18 formulations, and the retail price of 23 new drugs by bringing them under price control.

About the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority:

- It was established **to fix and revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs**, and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995.

- **Nodal Ministry:** It is an attached office of **the Department of Pharmaceuticals** (DoP), **Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers.**

- It is an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and **accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.**

- **Functions**

o To implement and enforce the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order in accordance with the powers delegated to it.

o To deal **with all legal matters arising out** of the decisions of the Authority.

o To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps

o To collect/ maintain **data on production, exports and imports**, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations

o To undertake and/ or **sponsor relevant studies** in respect of pricing of drugs/ pharmaceuticals

o To recruit/ appoint **the officers and other staff members of the Authority**, as per rules and procedures laid down by the Government

o To render advice to the Central Government on changes/ revisions in the drug policy

o To render assistance to the Central Government in the parliamentary matters relating to the drug pricing.

GULABI MEENAKARI HANDICRAFT

The Uttar Pradesh state government has decided to gift GI-tagged Gulabi meenakari handicrafts to the visiting delegates from G20 nations.

About Gulabi meenakari handicraft:
- It is one of the rarest crafts in India that is practised in the by lanes of Varanasi, near Gai Ghat.

- It is **an art form from Persia** and involves **colouring the surface of metals** by fusing different colours.
- This art **was brought to the city of Varanasi** by Persian enamellists **during the Mughal** era around the early 17th century.
- The word 'mina' is the feminine form of the Persian word 'Minoo' and means 'heaven'.
- It refers to the azure colour of heaven.
- In Varanasi, it is practised **on jewellery and home decor items.**
- Minakari work uses very **simple tools like salai** (an etching tool), kiln, metal palette, mortar and pestle, **kalam** (a tool used to apply enamel), brass dye, small scrubbing brush, forceps and **takala** (a needle-like tool to apply colours).
- **This craft can be found popularly in three forms**
  - **Ek Rang Khula Meena** in which only gold outlines are exposed and a single transparent colour is used.
  - **Panch Rangi Meena** in which the five colours of red, white, green, light blue and dark blue are used
  - **Gulabi Meena** in which pink is the dominant colour.
- **Varanasi** is highly popular for Gulabi Minakari.