

Current Affairs of the Day

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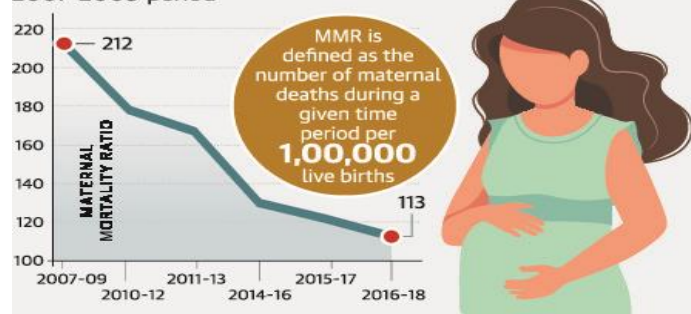
India registers a steep decline in maternal mortality ratio

Key findings:

➤ The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India has declined to 113 in 2016-18 from 122 in 2015-17 and 130 in 2014-2016, according to the special bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India 2016-18, released by the Office of the Registrar General's Sample Registration System (SRS).

Healthy trend

The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) between 2016 and 2018 dropped to 113 in India, almost 100 deaths lesser than in the 2007-2009 period



➤ One of the key indicators of maternal mortality is the MMR, defined as the number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births. The target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 1,00,000 live births.

Performance of states:

➤ The MMR of various States according to the bulletin includes Assam (215), Bihar (149), Madhya Pradesh (173), Chhattisgarh (159), Odisha (150), Rajasthan (164), Uttar Pradesh (197) and Uttarakhand (99). The southern States registered a lower MMR — Andhra Pradesh (65), Telangana (63), Karnataka (92), Kerala (43) and Tamil Nadu (60).

What is Maternal mortality?

➤ Maternal mortality in a region is a measure of reproductive health of women in the area.

As per the World Health Organization, maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.



No postal ballot facility for voters above 65: EC

- The Election Commission on Thursday said the postal ballot facility for electors above the age of 65 in the Bihar Assembly elections, which would have been the first time it would have been used since the Centre had notified it on June 19, would not be implemented.
- In a statement, the EC said the decision was taken for the Assembly elections and bypolls due soon due to logistical challenges. It had instructed Bihar authorities to limit the number of electors to 1,000 per polling station due to the pandemic, for which 34,000 additional stations are being set up.
- The poll body said the option of postal ballots would be available to electors over 80 years of age, persons with disabilities, essential service workers and those infected with COVID-19 or suspected to be.
- After the Law Ministry notified the extension of postal ballots to electors over 65, several political parties had raised concerns over the decision.

Iran had gone silent on rail project: India

- The Government of India says it had not received any response from Iran since December 2019 on the future of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project that the state-owned railway construction company IRCON was to have constructed and financed. The ONGC's foreign arm OVL is also out of the Farzad-B gas field exploration project.
- The government cited policy changes by the Iranian government, Iran's precarious finances, and the U.S. sanctions situation as the reasons for the decisions on Indian infrastructure projects in Iran, which would both be undertaken through local companies instead.
- Last week, Iranian Railways and its transport department inaugurated laying of track for the 628-km stretch from the southern port city of Chabahar to Zahedan on the border with Afghanistan. Officials had told The Hindu that the track would now be funded by Iran's own National Development fund.
- According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), IRCON had completed its site inspection and review of the feasibility report for the project last year



under an MoU signed between India and Iran during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in 2016.

- The MEA also confirmed that India is no longer involved in the Farzad-B gas field project where ONGC had originally signed an agreement for exploration in 2002, investing approximately \$100 million thus far. The MEA said "policy changes" in Iran were responsible for the decision but didn't give details.
- "In January 2020, we were informed that in the immediate future, Iran would develop the field on its own and would like to involve India appropriately at a later stage. This matter remains under discussion," Mr. Srivastava said.
- India had proposed to invest \$1.6 billion in the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line, and approximately \$6 billion in the Farzad-B gas field project.

Chabahar Port project:

- The MEA said India's main investment in the Chabahar Port where it has taken over operations of one terminal, had progressed well in the last few years, handling 82 ships with 12 lakh tonnes of bulk cargo in 8200 containers since December 2018.

'Judicial review can't be done prior to Speaker's decision'

- Constitutional courts cannot judicially review disqualification proceedings under the **Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law)** of the **Constitution** until the Speaker or Chairman makes a final decision on merits.

Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachillu and Others:

- A 28-year-old judgment of the Supreme Court in Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachillu and Others has said that "**judicial review cannot be available at a stage prior to the making of a decision by the Speaker/Chairman and a quia timet action would not be permissible. Nor would interference be permissible at an interlocutory stage of the proceedings.**"
- The only exception for any interlocutory interference being cases of interlocutory disqualifications or suspensions which may have grave, immediate and irreversible repercussions and consequence.



Significance:

- The judgment is significant in the case of ousted Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot and the 18 MLAs, who were issued notice under the anti-defection law after the ruling Congress sought their disqualification.
- They have approached the Rajasthan High Court challenging the constitutionality of Paragraph 2(1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule which makes “voluntarily giving up membership of a political party” liable for disqualification.

‘Is India a hub for drug peddling?’

Key Points:

- Observing that Punjab is serving as the transit point for the smuggling of narcotic drugs which make their way as far as Kerala, the Madras High Court has directed the Centre to spell out whether India is being used as a hub by international drug cartels. It also asked if the money involved was being used to fund terrorists and anti-national activities.
- A Bench of Justices N. Kirubakaran and V. M. Velumani said: “We have a bad experience in the State of Punjab where youngsters and students are mostly addicted to drugs and the same situation should not be allowed to spread to other States. It is known that Punjab is the transit point on the drug route and the State has become a major consumer base.”
- The judges said the High Court of Kerala, too, had taken a suo motu public interest litigation petition recently on the basis of a letter written by retired IPS officer N. Ramachandran, highlighting the increase in drug abuse cases and related crimes. The Kerala police filed an affidavit conceding that educational institutions had become a hotbed of drug peddlers.
- Further, the Bench referred to a recent survey by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in association with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), which revealed that 3.1 crore Indians use cannabis, bhang, ganja, charas, heroin and opium. However, the Bench said, only one in 20 drug addicts gets treatment at a hospital.



- The problem of drug addiction of children is more prevalent in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana. It is a fact that many youngsters, especially students, are getting addicted due to easy availability of narcotic drugs.

Explain the steps taken:

- They directed the Centre to explain by June 28 the steps it had taken so far to curb the menace.
- The court also wanted to know about the involvement of international drug mafias in crime, the approximate value of drugs transacted in the country, and the remedial measures undertaken by the Centre.
- The queries were posed in interim orders passed on a habeas corpus petition which had challenged the preventive detention of a drug peddler under the Goondas Act.