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Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)

Central Government has allocated ₹321.69 Crore under Nirbhaya Fund for implementation of ERSS project across the country.

Under this project, a single number based 112 emergency services which will connect to Police, Fire, Health and other help lines through an Emergency Response Centre in the State. The service also includes a '112 India' mobile app integrated with Panic Button of smart phones and ERSS State website for ease of citizen in availing immediate assistance. To increase the effectiveness of Emergency Response, the ERC has also been integrated with Location Based Services provided by Telecom Service Providers.

Himachal Pradesh is the first state to launch pan-India single emergency number '112' under ERSS. The '112 India' mobile app will be subsequently rolled out in all States & Union Territories to help people across the country access the unified emergency services.

To ensure safety of women, a SHOUT feature has been introduced in '112 India' mobile app. It helps seek immediate assistance from registered volunteers in the vicinity apart from the immediate assistance from Emergency Response Centre.

Source: PIB.

WSIM

The report is presented by IScience (US based LLC) states the findings from the latest Water Security Indicator Model (WSIM). ISciences Water Security Indicator Model (WSIM) monitors and forecasts water anomalies on a near global basis.

WSIM includes algorithms to assess the impacts of water anomalies on people, agriculture and electricity generation. WSIM has been run continuously since April 2011 and has been validated against subsequent monitoring based on observed data.

The forecast predicts severe to exceptional surplus water for regions including Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Mizoram. Moderate to severe deficits were forecast for Bihar. From February through April, deficits in India are expected to moderate overall and some regions in the country's eastern third will normalize.

However, intense deficits will persist throughout Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and along the Tungabhadra River through Karnataka.

The forecast for the final months — May through July (2019) — indicates primarily moderate deficits in India and pockets throughout the region. The 12-month forecast through July 2019 indicates exceptional (greater than 40 years) water deficits in Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh.

Source: The Hindu.

Inclusive Wealth Report 2018

A country's inclusive wealth is the social value (not dollar price) of all its capital assets, including natural capital, human capital and produced capital.

The IWR 2018 builds on previous versions of the report (IWR2012 and IWR 2014) and advances methods of measuring the base of economy- capital of all types.

It covers the period from 1990 to 2014, which is 25 years, which provides us with a picture of the changes in capital assets over almost a generation. It is biennially released by UNEP, that seeks to evaluate and report on a country's wealth and wellbeing. IWI is a tool assessing a nation's ability to look after its wealth in a way that is sustainable and safeguards its future generations.

Highlights of the report

- The Inclusive wealth (IW) in 135 countries was higher in 2014 compared to the level in 1990 and the global growth rate of IW was 44% over the indicated period.
- This implies an average growth rate of 1.8% per year.
- However, during the same period the global GDP growth per year was 3.4%, which is close to twofold of the annual growth rate of growth in IW.
- The global level growth of each of the three capitals over the study period indicate that produced capital was growing at an average rate of 3.8% per year and health and education induced human capital was growing at 2.1%.
- Contrary, natural capital was decreasing at a rate of 0.7% per annum.
- The structure of capital at the global scale as of 2014 has composed of produced capital (21%), human capital (59% of which 26% education induced human capital and 33% is health induced human capital), and natural capital (20%).

Source: The Hindu.

Maternity benefits under PMVVY

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 31, 2016 The scheme largely defeats the purpose it is supposed to serve: according to a recent analysis, it excludes more than half of all pregnancies because first-order births account for only 43% of all births in India

Further, the PMMVY provides little assistance to women who lose their baby, because the successive payments are made only if the corresponding conditionality's are met

Problems in the scheme

- Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013, every pregnant woman is entitled to maternity benefits of ₹6,000, unless she is already receiving similar benefits as a government employee or under other laws
- PMMVY violates the NFSA in several ways
- First, the benefits have been reduced from ₹6,000 to ₹5,000 per child
- Second, they are now restricted to the first living child
- Third, they are further restricted to women above the age of 18 years
- The application process is cumbersome and exclusionary: a separate form has to be filled, signed and submitted for each of the three instalments, along with a copy of the

applicant's mother-child protection card, her Aadhaar card, her husband's Aadhaar card, and the details of a bank account linked to her Aadhaar number

- The compulsory linking of the applicant's bank account with Aadhaar often causes problems

Source: The Hindu.

UGC's new norms for recruitment

According to the new recruitment norms released by the University Grants Commission (UGC) recently, the Doctoral degree holders from the top 500 foreign universities will be eligible for direct recruitment as an assistant professor in Indian varsities.

This direct recruitment eligibility of international PhD holders is applicable for the disciplines of Arts, Commerce, Humanities, Education, Law, Social Sciences, Sciences, Languages, Library Science, Physical Education and Journalism and Mass Communication. The top 500 ranking of the university shall be referred from four famous world university ranking systems, i.e., Quacquarelli Symonds, Times Higher Education rankings and the Academic Ranking of World Universities of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

Waiver: While PhD degree holders from Indian university with required percentage in Masters' are also eligible for direct recruitment, the minimum requirements related to Masters' programme have been waived off for international PhD holders.

Exemption: The direct recruitment eligibility only grants candidates an exemption from the written test but their performance in the interview will be a deciding factor for their appointment.

Earlier, the candidates eligible for the post were required to have minimum 55 per cent marks in the Master's degree in concerned subject from an Indian University or an equivalent degree from an accredited foreign university.mThe candidate was also required to have cleared the National Eligibility Test conducted by the UGC or the CSIR, or a similar test accredited by the UGC, like SLET, SET.

Source: The Hindu.

Lancet urges response to heatwave exposure surge

According to the Lancet Countdown 2018 on Health and Climate Change report published recently, globally each person was exposed to an additional 1.4 days of heat wave between 2000 and 2017 compared to the baseline period of 1986 to 2005. The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change was produced by 150 experts from 27 universities and institutions including the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

The Lancet Countdown tracks 41 indicators across five domains namely:

- Climate change impacts, exposures, and vulnerability
- Adaptation, planning, and resilience for health
- Mitigation actions and health co-benefits
- Finance and economics
- Public and political engagement

The report named "Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: Shaping the health of nations for centuries to come has been prepared jointly by the Lancet with the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The report urges a review of existing occupational health standards, labour laws and sectoral regulations for worker safety in relation to climatic conditions.

Source: The Hindu.

Editorial

To Read

Genetic modification goes beyond ethics

A patient suffering a condition like Huntington disease would want to see gene editing used to prevent such genetic diseases

Someone somewhere was bound to do it. Ever since researchers at the University of Alicante in Spain came up with the revolutionary new gene-editing tool CRISPR, the chance to play god and the temptation to do it have been beckoning scientists. So when Shenzhen-based Chinese researcher He Jiankui claimed, ahead of an international conference on gene editing in Hong Kong, that he had created the world's first genetically edited babies by altering their DNA using CRISPR, it should have come as no surprise. His claim is still unverified and, in fact, Southern University of Science and Technology, which hosts his lab, later said his work "seriously violated academic ethics and standards".

At the heart of He's work is CRISPR (short for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats), the gene editing tool that allowed geneticists and researchers to edit parts of the genome by removing, adding or altering sections of the DNA sequence, much more efficiently than earlier techniques did.

He claimed the genes of the twins had been edited to resist the HIV virus, which is what makes the framing of the argument against genetic editing much more complex. The announcement caused predictable consternation with many wondering if these experiments have gone too far and arguing that tinkering with the variability of a gene pool can have disastrous consequences given that genes are connected and for one single character many of them have to work in unison.

There is also the issue of human germline editing. The germline is the sequence of cells that develop into eggs and sperm, and any changes made in it are likely to be passed down to future generations. But the issue goes beyond bio-ethics.

A patient suffering a condition like Huntington disease would want to see gene editing used to prevent such genetic diseases, since they don't have any cure. However, as has been argued elsewhere, its use in trying to prevent a deaf person being born is clearly abhorrent, especially since once it becomes prevalent, anyone born with a genetic condition like that runs the risk of being shunned by society.

Scientific experiments have gone awry often enough in the past. The atom bomb is a great example of scientific endeavour gone wrong. What started with the simple statement that a small amount of matter could release a lot of energy built upon Niels Bohr's atomic model morphed into the most destructive discovery mankind has ever seen. As if the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not enough, today 73 years later, that one discovery influences our lives and society in massively negative terms. In the race to create defences against nuclear weapons, arms budgets of some of the poorest nations in the world now far exceed their spends on education or health.

But the problem with a moral high ground on this issue is that there remain far too many human problems for which there is simply no cure.

In 1996, when Dolly the sheep became the first mammal ever to be cloned from another individual's body cell, fears were raised that human cloning was inevitable. Since then horses, cats, dogs and livestock have been cloned across the world without creating much of a stir though the announcement of two genetically identical macaques, Zhong Zhong and Hua Hua, early this year at a laboratory in China did stoke fears of human cloning being the inevitable next step.

And yet it hasn't always been for the worse. When scientists in the 1970s discovered how to fertilise human eggs in test tubes there was the apprehension that this might lead to people cherry-picking only high-quality parents for their children. As it turned out those fears were unfounded and the discovery became one of the greatest boons for people who were infertile and couldn't have children.

Genetics is a bit of a stab in the dark and in strictly game theory terms, evolution is open-ended and, therefore, painful and wasteful. It is multidirectional and not always progressive with many inadvertent mutations as a result of which we are saddled with an imperfect replication mechanism. One fallout of this has been that, instead of Malthusian natural factors to keep populations balanced, we have had statist interventions that snuff out people through genocides and wars.

Social systems are also Darwinian in many ways, making decisions based on incomplete information. Hayekian market proponents would say the market demands genetic interventions. Human civilization has always progressed by interfering with the natural evolutionary process. Of course, our evolved empathy would shun genetic modulation. In fact, India does not have a comprehensive gene editing policy in place, though germline gene editing is banned in line with international norms.

Yet, in the face of persisting diseases and crippling human conditions, divine intervention may sometimes need to be supplemented with genetic ones in a carefully regulated environment.

Mains Question

Q: Fall in oil prices gives the rupee and the Indian economy a much-needed boost. Critically comment.