

ASHA and Global health awards

- India's one million Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) volunteers have received arguably the biggest international recognition in form of the World Health Organization's Global Health Leaders Awards 2022.
- The ASHAs were among the six awardees announced at the 75th World Health Assembly in Geneva.
- This World Health Organization (WHO) award is in recognition of the work done by ASHA volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as for serving as a link between communities and health systems.
- It is important to note that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, ASHAs have made extraordinary contributions towards enabling increased access to primary healthcare services; i.e. maternal and child health including immunisation and treatment for hypertension, diabetes and tuberculosis, etc., for both rural and urban populations, with special focus on difficult-to-reach habitations.
- Over the years, ASHAs have played an outstanding role in making India polio free, increasing routine immunisation coverage; reducing maternal mortality; improving newborn survival and in greater access to treatment for common illnesses.
- Genesis of the programme India launched the ASHA programme in 2005-06 as part of the National Rural Health Mission.
- Initially rolled out in rural areas, with the launch of the National Urban Health Mission in 2013, it was extended to urban settings as well.
- Each of these women-only volunteers work with a population of nearly 1,000 people in rural and 2,000 people in urban areas, with flexibility for local adjustments.
- The core of the ASHA programme has been an intention to build the capacity of community members in taking care of their own health and being partners in health services.
- The biggest inspiration for designing the ASHA programme came from the Mitandin (meaning 'a female friend' in Chhattisgarhi) initiative of Chhattisgarh, which had started in May 2002.
- The Mitandin were/are all-female volunteers available for every 50 households and 250 people.
- One, the ASHA selection involved key village stakeholders to ensure community ownership for the initiatives and forge a partnership.

- Two, ASHAs coming from the same village where they worked had an aim to ensure familiarity, better community connect and acceptance.
- Three, the idea of having activists in their name was to reflect that they were/are the community's representative in the health system, and not the lowest-rung government functionary in the community (as was the perception with the erstwhile community health volunteer, a few decades ago).
- Four, calling them volunteers was partly to avoid a painfully slow process for government recruitment and to allow an opportunity to implement performance-based incentives in the hope that this approach would bring about some accountability.
- Anganwadi workers (AWW) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) as well as with panchayat representatives and influential community members at the village level was facilitated.
- This resulted in an all-women partnership, or A-A-A: ASHA, AWW and ANM, of three frontline functionaries at the village level, that worked together to facilitate health and nutrition service delivery to the community.
- Among the A-A-A, ASHAs are the only ones who do not have a fixed salary; they do not have opportunity for career progression.
- Though performance-based incentives are supplemented by a fixed amount in a few Indian States, the total payment continues to remain low and often delayed
- First, Indian States need to develop mechanisms for higher remuneration for ASHAs
- Second, it is time that in-built institutional mechanisms are created for capacity-building and avenues for career progression for ASHAs to move to other cadres such as ANM, public health nurse and community health officers are opened.
- Third, extending the benefits of social sector services including health insurance (for ASHAs and their families) should be considered
- Fourth, while the ASHA programme has benefitted from many internal and regular reviews by the Government, an independent and external review of the programme needs to be given urgent and priority consideration.
- Fifth, there are arguments for the regularisation of many temporary posts in the National Health Mission

and making ASHAs permanent government employees.

THE HINDU

Death penalty

- The constitutionality of the death penalty was upheld in 1980 in *Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab*, which greatly emphasised 'individualised sentencing' and called upon courts to consider the 'crime' and the circumstances of the accused.
- However, since *Bachan Singh* there have been disagreements on which cases warrant the imposition of the death penalty and the nature of information about the accused relevant for sentencing.
- With a vast majority of prisoners being poor, quality legal representation has always been a concern.
- The Bench passed an order in *Manoj* in September 2021 calling for reports of the probation officers, prison officers and mental health professionals.
- In the final judgment delivered recently, the Supreme Court took important steps towards realising an 'individualised sentencing enquiry' as envisaged by the court in *Bachan Singh* 42 years ago.
- The judgment of the Supreme Court in *Manoj* is significant for two reasons: first, it indicates a shift towards an evidence-based inquiry to sentencing that invites expert opinions and reports from a wide range of disciplines.
- Second, it expands the scope of mitigating factors by calling for reports that bring forth pre-offence details such as socio-economic status, education, family background and also post-offence details such as the conduct of the prisoner in prison.
- Mitigating factors pertain to life circumstances of an individual that can help determine punishment.
- Keeping in mind the introduction of non-legal expertise into courtrooms, courts will need to equip themselves to appreciate the evidence so presented.
- Questions on conflicting findings in reports and opinions presented to the court during sentencing would also need to be addressed keeping in mind existing evidentiary standards and judicial dicta, which suggests courts must not be constrained by confines of the evidence act in capital sentencing.

THE HINDU

Gun control laws

What do gun laws in the U.S. say?

- The Second Amendment of the U.S. constitution, which states that “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed”, is often attributed as the root cause of all firearm-related violence.
- The U.S. Supreme Court previously held that the amendment protects the right to “keep and bear arms” for self-defence,

What about India?

- Gun licence applicants in India must be at least 21 years and not convicted of any offence involving violence, of ‘unsound mind’ or a threat to public safety and peace.
- Upon receiving an application, the licensing authority (i.e., the Home Ministry), asks the officer in-charge of the nearest police station to submit a report about the applicant after thorough vetting.
- The Arms Act amended in 2019 reduces the number of firearms that an individual can procure from three to two.
- Indian laws are particularly elaborate in dealing with sale and unlawful trade of weapons.

- It also enlists specific provisions on curtailing the use of licensed weapons to ensure social harmony.
- No entity is permitted to sell or transfer any firearm which does not bear the name of the maker, manufacturer’s number or any other visible or stamped identification mark.
- Any act of conversion (such as shortening the barrel of a firearm or converting an imitation firearm into a firearm) or unlawful import-export is punishable with an imprisonment term of seven years, which may extend to life imprisonment and be liable to monetary fines.

THE HINDU

EU ban on Russian oil

- The EU on May 30 reached an agreement to ban 90% of Russian crude oil imports by the end of the year.
- The partial embargo exempts pipeline oil in order to bypass Hungary’s objections to the ban.

What was the rationale behind such a move?

- The Russian economy is heavily dependent on energy exports, with

the EU paying billions of dollars every month to Russia for its crude and refined products.

- The EU wants to block this massive revenue inflow which, as repeatedly pointed out by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, is akin to Europeans bankrolling Russia's war.
- The EU has been attempting, ever since the Ukraine invasion, to build consensus on ways to hurt Russia economically so that it is forced to roll back its military offensive.
- The most obvious route was to stop buying Russian energy, which isn't easy given European households' dependence on Russian oil and gas.
- However, in the context of two long term EU objectives reducing fossil fuel dependence in favour of renewables, and eliminating dependence on Russian energy for greater strategic autonomy and energy security member states agreed to make a start by phasing out Russian oil.

What are the terms of the 'compromise deal' that has been agreed upon?

- The main departure from the original proposal is the "temporary exemption" from the oil embargo for countries that import Russian crude via pipeline.

- In other words, EU leaders have, in principle, agreed to ban all seaborne imports of Russian crude, which account for two-thirds of EU's oil imports from Russia.
- However, with Germany and Poland pledging to phase out even their pipeline imports from Russia by the end of the year, the embargo would eliminate 90% of Russian oil imports.
- The remaining 10% that's been allowed represents a free pass for Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria to continue imports via the Druzhba pipeline, the world's largest oil pipeline network.
- Additionally, Hungary has obtained a guarantee that it could even import seaborne Russian oil in case of a disruption to their pipeline supplies.

How will the sanctions affect Russia?

- Analysts calculate that a two-thirds cut in Europe's imports of Russian oil would mean a reduction of 1.2-1.5 million barrels a day in oil, and one million barrels in refined products, which might cause Russia an annual loss in revenue of \$10 billion. Given Russia's limited storage infrastructure, the cutback in demand would force Russia to find other markets.

How will the sanctions affect Europe?

- It is likely to further fuel inflation in Europe, where many countries are already facing a cost-of-living crisis.
- EU leaders have tried to balance contradictory pressures of having to take decisive action against a military aggressor on European soil, but without causing too much pain to its citizens.

How has India responded to these developments?

- India ramped up purchases of Russian crude at discounted prices in the months following the Russian invasion, and this policy is expected to continue.
- The announcement of the EU ban caused an immediate surge in oil prices, and as Europe seeks alternate sources from West Asia, Africa and elsewhere for its oil needs, prices are expected to stay high.

THE HINDU

Indus water treaty

Under the treaty signed between India and Pakistan in 1960, all the waters of three rivers, namely Ravi, Sutlej and Beas (Eastern Rivers) were allocated to India for exclusive use.

- While, the waters of Western rivers - Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab were allocated to Pakistan except for specified domestic, non-consumptive and agricultural use permitted to India as provided in the Treaty.
- To utilize the waters of the Eastern rivers which have been allocated to India for exclusive use, India has constructed following dams:
 - Bhakra Dam on Satluj, Pong and Pandoh Dam on Beas and Thein (Ranjit Sagar) on Ravi.
 - About 2 Million Acre Feet (MAF) of water annually from Ravi is reported to be still flowing unutilized to Pakistan
- Shahpurkandi Project: This project will help in utilizing the waters coming out from powerhouse of Thein dam for irrigation and power generation in J&K and Punjab.
- Construction of Ujh multipurpose project: This project will create a storage of water on river Ujh, a tributary of Ravi for irrigation and power generation in India.

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