

## Reform in NREGA

- Address delays in wage payments to restore the faith of workers in the program
- The second is: to strengthen implementation capacities where expenditure is low instead of curbing expenditure where employment generation is high
- The third is: to run the program like a demand -based law and not a scheme.
- Intermittent and unpredictable fund releases by the central government are one of the fundamental reasons why State governments are unable to ensure the full potential of NREGA
- The fourth is: to make discussions on any proposed reforms participatory.
- NREGA emerged from the demands of a vibrant peoples' movement across India and its cornerstones have been its path-breaking provisions for public accountability.
- The fifth is: it is time the Government of India makes an earnest attempt to map the impact of each of its "reforms" on access to and the expenditure of NREGA, particularly in poorer States.

**THE HINDU**

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## TAX treatment of tobacco

- In 2017, the economic burden and health-care expenses due to tobacco use and second-hand smoke exposure amounted to ₹2,340 billion, or 1.4% of GDP while India's average annual tobacco tax revenue stands at only ₹537.5 billion.
- Despite the government's goal of making India a \$5 trillion economy, the increasing affordability of tobacco poses a threat to this vision and could harm GDP growth.
- Tobacco use is also the cause of nearly 3,500 deaths in India every day, which impacts human capital and GDP growth in a negative way.
- One issue is the overuse of ad valorem taxes, which are not effective in reducing consumption. ad valorem tax, any tax imposed on the basis of the monetary value of the taxed item.
- Many countries use a specific or mixed tax system for harmful products.
- The GST system in India relies more on ad valorem taxes than the pre-GST system, which primarily used specific excise taxes.
- There is a large discrepancy in taxation between tobacco products.
- Despite cigarettes accounting for only 15% of tobacco users, they

generate 80% or more of tobacco taxes.

- Bidis and smokeless tobacco have low taxes, encouraging consumption.
- The main principle behind tobacco taxation should be in protecting public health.
- It is important that all products that are exclusively used for tobacco making are brought under the uniform 28% GST slab
- Many smokeless tobacco and bidi manufacturers operate in the informal sector, which reduces the tax base on these products.
- While these exemptions are intended to protect small businesses, the public health rationale requires that they not be extended to businesses that produce or distribute tobacco products.

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### Modification of the Indus water treaty

#### What are some of its key provisions?

- The Indus river basin has six rivers Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej originating from Tibet and flowing through the Himalayan ranges to enter Pakistan, ending in the south of Karachi.

- The treaty prescribed how water from the six rivers would be shared between India and Pakistan.
- It allocated the three western rivers Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum to Pakistan for unrestricted use, barring certain non-consumptive, agricultural, and domestic uses by India.
- Similarly, the three Eastern Rivers Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej were allocated to India for unrestricted usage. It also required both countries to establish a Permanent Indus Commission constituted by permanent commissioners from both sides.
- The functions of the commission include serving as a forum for the exchange of information on the rivers and as a first stop for the resolution of conflicts.
- Annexure D of the IWT allows India to build 'run of the river' hydropower projects (projects which do not require live storage of water).
- The treaty also allows Pakistan to raise objections over such projects being built, if it does not find them to be compliant with the rules.

#### What are Pakistan's objections over the Kishenganga and Ratle projects?

- Kishenganga, a tributary of the Jhelum river, originates in J&K and joins the river in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir
- In 2010, Pakistan took the matter to the International Court of Arbitration at the Hague, this time, objecting to the diversion of water from Kishanganga.
- The Court gave India a green signal for the project (subject to conditions) in its final ruling in 2013.
- The conflict, however, did not end there, with Pakistan approaching the World Bank three years later in 2016 and again in 2018, objecting to the design.
- It also tried to stop the construction of the dam in 2016 by firing shells near the dam site.
- The project was, however, finally inaugurated in 2018.
- As for India's 850-megawatt Ratle hydroelectric power project on the Chenab river, Islamabad has repeatedly raised concerns over its design, insisting that India would use the project's reservoir to create deliberate and artificial water shortage or cause flooding in Pakistan
- To resolve the long-standing dispute, India has called for the Treaty's modification so that Pakistan is provided an opportunity to initiate

“intergovernmental negotiations” within 90 days regarding the differences that the Indian side has described as a “material breach.

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#### **Women officers in the army**

- The Army stated that the process for selection of women officers to command assignments in the rank of Colonel, a major step towards bringing them at par with their male counterparts, have been conducted.
- In a landmark judgment in the Babita Puniya case in February 2020, the Supreme Court directed that women officers in the Army be granted PC as well as command postings in all services other than combat.
- All women officers who were granted PC are undergoing special training courses and assignments to empower them for higher leadership roles.

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#### **AISHE Data**

- The Union Education Ministry on Sunday released data from the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), 2020-2021, which showed a 7.5% increase in student enrolments across the country from the 2019--

20 figures, with the total enrolments reaching 4.13 crore.

- The survey revealed that in 2020-21 when the COVID-19 pandemic began, there was a 7% rise in enrolments in distance education programmes.
- The data showed two lakh more Scheduled Caste students, about three lakh more Scheduled Tribe students and six lakh more Other Backward Classes students getting enrolled for higher education in 2020-21 than in the previous year.
- While the increase was noted in absolute numbers, the proportion of SC students dropped to 14.2% in 2020-21 from 14.7% the previous year and the proportion of OBC students to 35.8% from 37%.
- The proportion of Muslim students dropped to 4.6% from 5.5% in 2019-20 with the proportion of “other minority students” dropping to 2% from 2.3%.
- The number of students in the Persons with Disabilities category also dropped in 2020-21 to 79,035 from 92,831 the previous year.
- However, female enrolment had increased to 49% of the total enrolments in 2020-21 compared with 45% the previous year.

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