

# Topic 1

## Intimate Partner Violence

### Relevancy:

- GS Mains paper I, II
- Social issues, Women related issues, Intimate partner violence.

### Recently:

- Violent acts, at the hands of a husband or a partner (intimate partner violence, or IPV), are becoming distressingly common worldwide.
- The World Health Organisation estimates that almost one-third of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, which affects their physical and mental well-being.
- Boys who witness parental violence are more likely to use it in their adult relationships; girls are more likely to justify it.

### Reasons behind increasing violence against women in relationships:

- These stem from the belief that women who don't obey or don't perform their *set gender roles* deserve to be beaten.
- Intimate relationships are important sites where violence against women is used to perpetuate *patriarchy*.

### What could be the solutions?

- Strategies to address IPV have included legal reforms, awareness creation drives, and strengthening of women's civil rights.
- **More inclusive alternatives required:** As criminal justice solutions have largely been inaccessible to socially precarious women, a more inclusive alternative is to have collective-based resolution mechanisms.
- **SHGs:** The potential of large-scale groups of women, such as self-help groups (SHGs), becomes critical in the Indian context.
- **Community dispute resolution mechanisms:** India has experimented with many models of community dispute resolution mechanisms — the Nari Adalats (women

courts) in various States, Women's Resource Centres (Rajasthan), Shalishi (West Bengal), and Mahila Panchayats (Delhi) — which have seen IPV as a public issue rather than a personal problem.

### **Increased role of NGOS and SHGs:**

- Several NGOs have co-opted these models so that women can resolve cases of violence without getting entangled in tedious legal processes.
- SHGs are the most widely present collectives across regions.
- The experiences of large-scale programmes offer valuable insights into action for IPV redressal within SHG-led development models.
- These, as well as previous models, provide two key lessons — one, collectives of women need adequate investment for building their capacities; and two, mediation of IPV requires specialised structures to avoid manipulation by kinship relations and political affinities.
- Not all groups of women become safe spaces to discuss violence. SHGs must first become enabling spaces where the economic and social concerns of women are stated as priorities.
- Freedom from violence must be stated as a necessary component of empowerment. It takes time for most women to recognise that violence is unacceptable.
- To enable them to understand this, there must be investment in specific training, and gender analysis processes.
- SHGs are mostly seen as administrative entities. Their social role can be enhanced to tackle the widespread problem of IPV.

# Topic 2

## Spinal Biodiscs

### Relevancy:

- GS Prelims, GS Mains paper III
- Sci-tech, Health, Spinal Biodiscs

### Recently:

- Researchers from IIT-Guwahati have fabricated a spinal biodisc construct using Mulberry Silk that is similar to human intervertebral disc in form and function.
- The biodiscs have been successfully tried on mice.
- If approved for use in humans, the biodisc can be used for spinal disc replacement therapy.

### More about Biodisc:

- As per the researchers, the most challenging part was replicating the anatomical form of the disk (annulus fibrosus, or AF).
  - The human disc is marked by 20-25 cross-aligned layers where successive layers are at 30 degrees angle to its vertical axis, but in alternate directions; this structure gives the disc superior compressive strength.
  - The construct had a load-bearing capacity comparable with the human disk. Constructs seeded with cells taken from the disk of a pig or human mesenchymal stem cells (a type of stem cells) that became AF-like cells were able to grow and multiply within the structures.
  - As per the animal studies, the construct has been proved to be biocompatible.
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# Topic 3

## Agriculture marketing

### Background

Almost 40 per cent of all fruits and vegetables are lost annually in India between the grower and the consumer mainly due to lack of storage facilities, a weak transportation system and bad roads. Climate change is expected to make the situation worse. States alone cannot revamp the agricultural marketing sector, primarily due to paucity of funds and technology. Private investment on a massive scale needs to be invited to upgrade and build large storage and warehousing systems that are climate resilient. However, sweeping reforms will see light only when agricultural marketing is brought under the Concurrent or Union list with the consent of the States. The country will achieve food security only when the income of farmers is secured and doubled.

### Debate of agriculture Marketing?

- More than ever before, the country's agricultural marketing sector is garnering attention and is the subject of an intense intellectual discourse.
- No sooner did the Centre pitch for restructuring agricultural marketing to double farm income by 2022 than voices of dissent began to be heard.
- Scathing criticism was directed towards farm expert and NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand, who strongly underlined in a recent article that it is imperative to bring agriculture marketing into the Concurrent or Union list to benefit farmers.
- Why is there opposition to a move that is expected to benefit farmers? Is there a flaw in the proposed reform?
- Most States have welcomed the proposal to move agriculture marketing into either the Concurrent or Union list from the State list as this will guarantee remunerative prices to farmers. However, some major States continue to offer stiff resistance saying this will pave the way for the death of agriculture and is against the spirit of cooperative federalism.

### What were the recommendations of Ashok Dalwai committee w.r.t. marketing?

- The Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income under the chairmanship of Ashok Dalwai, in its draft report, justifies the recommendation saying marketing has no boundaries; this necessitates a pan-India operation to meet the demand across the country.
- Besides, the committee has also recommended rolling out the model Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act 2017 which would facilitate single-point levy of taxes, promote direct interface between farmers and end-users, and give freedom to farmers to sell their produce to whomsoever and wherever they get better prices.
- If States continue to oppose the proposed reforms which promise to allow farmers a wider choice of markets beyond the local mandi, the losers will be none other than the farmers themselves.

### **Why markets are important?**

- The country's food production has increased tremendously from just 51 million tonnes in 1950-51 to about 252 million tonnes in 2014-15.
- However, farm income did not grow much, as the Situation Assessment Survey of farmers' households and the Cost of Cultivation Survey data reveal.
- This was also highlighted by the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) headed by MS Swaminathan. The income realised from cultivation at current prices worked out to be only about ₹101 a day during 2012-13. Why is this so?
- The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) as well as the NCF (2006) had categorically emphasised that higher output alone will not provide higher income to farmers unless it is well marketed.
- Recent incidents of farmers reportedly dumping their bumper produce of tomatoes and onions and emptying cans of milk into drains is clear evidence of it.
- Had the markets been integrated, the surplus produce would have been transferred to deficit regions. If market integration offers a viable solution to the paradox of plenty, isn't it wise to hail such a reform rather than oppose it?

### **The state of agriculture market**

- Farmers' participation in agriculture markets is equally worrisome. The Dalwai Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income has pointed out that the share of farmers in consumer's price is very low; it generally varies from 15 to 40 per cent.
- Studies conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute and World Bank have confirmed this.
- The dominant role of middlemen among others is primarily responsible for farmers not realising a reasonable price for their produce, lowering farm income and profitability.
- This was recognised by the 12th Plan's Working Group on Agriculture Marketing (2011).
- The agriculture markets are crowded with middlemen and commission agents. As pointed out by Ramesh Chand, in Punjab, there are as many as 22,000 commission agents and innumerable middlemen in each market. According to Ashok Gulati, former chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, commission agents in Delhi charge exorbitant fees ranging from 6 per cent to 15 per cent.

## Topic 4

# What is government of India's response to cryptocurrencies?

- The government has decided to close regulatory gaps to keep a check on cryptocurrencies, including bitcoin.
- According to sources, the government is likely to define cryptocurrencies and bring in a regulatory framework in the Union Budget 2018-19.
- The sources said the government's expert committee on cryptocurrency headed by Economic Affairs Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg had prepared a draft report.
- This talks about the definition of the digital currency and whether it would be classified as currency, capital assets or intangible assets.
- Earlier, the government had formed another panel to study the subject.
- A government official privy to the development said it was essential to bring clarity on cryptocurrencies as the usage of such platforms was increasing.
- The expert panel defines cryptocurrencies as a "secure" and "anonymous way" of remittance of money and entering into a transaction. It states that these currencies are as good as fiat currencies, such as legal tenders issued by the government of any country, and are acceptable as a mode of payment by some entities.
- According to the report, over a thousand cryptocurrencies exist.
- Further, the report talks about how cryptocurrencies could be classified and what issues could emerge based on such classification, the sources said.
- On classifying them as a "currency", the report says since various entities accept bitcoin as a mode of payment, it seems that bitcoin is a currency.

### **What is RBI'S stand on it?**

- However, at present it has not been termed as currency under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) or as legal tender by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- "Whether bitcoin would be classified as a currency or not would be a matter of dispute and argument until the RBI clears its stand on it. If the RBI declares

that bitcoin is a currency, any trading in it would be subject to FEMA regulations,” it notes.

## TOPIC 5

### Mini-ministerial meeting of WTO members

#### Relevancy

- ✓ G.S. Paper 2
- ✓ About mini-ministerial meeting of WTO members
- ✓ Objectives and India's interest in the meeting

#### Recently

- ❖ It has been decided that there will be a mini-ministerial meeting of WTO members from both rich and developing nations to be called by India will seek to "revitalise" the multi-lateral trade body
- ❖ A mini-ministerial meeting of trade ministers of some developed and developing countries is proposed to be hosted by India in February.

#### What is the objective of the meeting?

- The objective of the meeting is to discuss ways to revitalise the WTO, which, we believe, is the best available multilateral institution to ensure predictable and transparent system of rule-making in the area of international trade
- About 40 WTO member countries are expected to participate in the meeting, which is taking place after collapse of the ministerial talks held in Buenos Aires in early December.
- The meeting would be in the backdrop of rich nations forming groupings to prepare ground for pushing new issues such as investment facilitation, preparing rules for e-commerce, promoting gender equality and reducing subsidy on fisheries.

#### What is India's interest in the meeting?

- India has been keenly pushing agriculture issues at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
- It has also been raising its voice against bringing new issues, especially those which are not directly linked to trade, on the negotiating table.

#### Why the talks collapsed at 11th ministerial conference?

- The talks at the WTO's 11th ministerial conference collapsed after the US went back on its commitment to find a permanent solution to the public food stockholding issue, a key matter for India.



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