Banning Single-stick Cigarettes

Why in news?

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare released a report about cancer management, prevention and diagnosis.

What are the proposals in the report?

- The report pointed to the National Health Policy's (2017) endeavour for a relative reduction in current tobacco use by 30% in 2025.
- Then, it suggested that the government must take effective measures to contain the sale of tobacco products. It recommends that the government
    1. prohibit the sale of single sticks of cigarettes and
    2. lay stringent penalties and fines on offenders.

Tobacco consumed in different ways accounts for nearly 50% of all cancers, collectively referred to as tobacco-related cancers - which can be prevented.

- The committee also suggests that the government
    1. Abolish all designated smoking areas in airports, hotels and restaurants, and
    2. Encourage a smoke-free policy in organisations.
- The Committee found that India has the lowest prices for tobacco products and thus, it must **increase taxes on all tobacco products**.
- The revenue acquired from this additional taxation, it proposes, could be used for cancer prevention and awareness.
- These measures flow from the observation that oral cancer accounts for the highest proportion of cancer cases in the country.

What are the other proposals?

- The committee sought a **ban on *gutka* and pan masala** alongside a prohibition on their direct and indirect advertisement.
- This is based on the observation that, in India, more than 80% of tobacco consumption is in the form of chewing tobacco with or without areca nut, aggressively marketed as a mouth freshener.
- The committee observed that there is an urgent need to **disincentivise the consumption of tobacco and alcohol** in the country.

Why the particular concern over single-stick cigarettes?

- Single sticks are more economical to acquire than a full pack of cigarettes.

- This may particularly appeal to adolescents and youth who may have limited money in hand.
- Single sticks are also preferred by people who may want to take it up for experimentation and have not started smoking on a regular basis.
- A ban on single-stick sales would compel a potential consumer to buy the entire pack which may not be particularly economical, thus curbing potential experimentation and the scope for regular intake.
- Moreover, a potential ban would also mean that the consumer would have to carry around the packet.

What are some of the observations?

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has observed that all forms of tobacco are harmful, and there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco.
- It also observed that smoking cigarettes is the most common way of tobacco use worldwide.
- Medical journal, *Lancet* noted in 2020, that by 2030, 7 million of annual deaths from smoking are expected to be from low and middle-income countries.
- Single stick sales, owing to their easier accessibility and affordability, can also work as a disincentive to quit smoking.
- Nicotine in tobacco products is highly addictive, and without cessation support only 4% of users who attempt to quit tobacco consumption will succeed, according to the WHO.
- Such support includes professional support and proven cessation medications, which can more than double their chances of successful quitting.

How effective can a ban on single stick sales be?

- Nevertheless that the proposed move would reduce consumption and sales, the government must consider **instituting vendor licensing**.
- In the absence of a vendor licensing regime, the ban on single sticks might not be very effective.
- As for tackling addiction, because cigarettes would not be available everywhere, the potential for recurrence of the consumption would reduce.
- While it would indeed be difficult people to rescue people who are highly addicted, those less addicted can be rescued.

Reference

The Hindu | The recommendation to ban the sale of single cigarettes

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