Concerns with Oxytocin Ban

What is the issue?

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- The Union Health Ministry has recently decided to restrict the production and sale of oxytocin. Click here to know more
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- The rationale of the decision is contested and the ban is expected to have severe public health consequences.
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What is the key reason?

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- The ban is primarily motivated by the misuse of the hormone in the dairy industry.
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- Oxytocin stimulates lactation in cattle.
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- Dairy farmers thus inject the drug indiscriminately to increase milk production.
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- This has increased the unlicensed facilities that are manufacturing the drug for veterinary use.
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- There is also a concern that oxytocin led to infertility in dairy animals.
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- It has also been linked to mastitis, a painful inflammation of the udder (mammary gland).
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- Another concern is the exposure of milk consumers to oxytocin drug through dairy products.
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Why is oxytocin crucial?

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- Nearly 45,000 Indian women die due to causes related to childbirth each year.
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- Oxytocin, a synthetic version of a human hormone, is a life-saver for these women.
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- It is used to induce labour in pregnant women and to stall postpartum bleeding.
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- The World Health Organization recommends it as the drug of choice in postpartum haemorrhage.
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- The ban thus seems to be ignoring this critical role of oxytocin in maternal health.
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What are the contentions?

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- **Validity** - There are some studies that add validity to the above concerns of ill-effects of oxytocin on cattle.
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- However, the science behind these claims is unclear and is not properly established.
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- The National Dairy Research Institute has said that there was no evidence that oxytocin led to infertility.
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- Another research claims that oxytocin content in buffalo milk did not alter with injections.
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- However, even if the ill-effects of oxytocin are real, a ban is not the right solution.
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- **Shortage** - Manufacture of the drug only by a single public sector unit could lead to drug shortages and price hikes.
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- The right approach would have been to strengthen regulation and crack down on illegal production.
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- Monopolising production will only remove the low-price options from the market.
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Source: The Hindu

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