Maternal Mortality in India

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Why in News?

A Lancet study (2026) highlights India's challenge in meeting the SDG target of reducing Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR.

- **Definition –** Maternal mortality is the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within 42 days of termination, resulting from pregnancy-related causes.
- **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** – It is the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births during a given period.
- **SDG Target –** Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) to *below 70 deaths per 1 lakh live births by 2030*.
- **India's Trend**
- **MMR Progress –** MMR fell from 508 in 1990 to 116 in 2023 (Lancet estimate); India recorded 24,700 maternal deaths in 2023.
- **Sample Registration System (SRS) 2021–23** – Reports a lower MMR of 88 per 100,000 live births, showing variation between datasets.
- **Causes** – Haemorrhage & Hypertensive disorders (40% of deaths), Covid 19 setback (2020 21) disrupted healthcare services, data discrepancies & wide demographic diversity.
- **State-Level Challenges**
  - Assam – MMR dropped from 215 to 110 (2015–2023).
  - Uttar Pradesh – MMR fell from 197 to 141, but is still above the national average.
  - Whereas the southern states are closer to achieving the SDG target.
  - National average pulled down by high burden states.
- **Targeted action to reduce MMR** – By strengthening primary healthcare systems, with a focus on maternal and child health.
- When child mortality declines, fertility rates tend to decrease as well - lower fertility, in turn, contributes to a reduction in maternal mortality.
- **Global Context** – 100 countries have already met the SDG target of below-70 MMR by 2023.
- India is in the 100–140 range, along with Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and DRC.
- **Top improver** – Despite challenges, India has been among the top improvers since 1990, alongside Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Morocco, Nepal, and Rwanda.
- **Comparisons caution** – India's large birth numbers (23.22 million in 2023) make direct comparison with smaller countries, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (565 per lakh) or Nigeria.

India ranks 2nd globally in maternal deaths, recording between 19,000 and 24,700 deaths annually, which represents about 10% of the worldwide total. (Nigeria holds the highest share.)

References

1. Indian Express | MMR
2. Sansad | MMR
3. World Population Review | MMR

