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Biodegradable Dinnerware Made from Areca Leaf Sheath

Why in news?

Recently, medical experts, and academicians from Karnataka have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking diplomatic and regulatory intervention to lift the U.S. FDA's import alert on biodegradable dinnerware made from areca nut leaf sheaths.

- **Biodegradable dinnerware** - It includes plates, cups, and tableware made from **natural materials** like **areca nut (betel nut) leaf sheaths**.
- The areca palm naturally sheds its leaf sheaths, which are collected without cutting trees.



- **Eco-friendly** - They decompose naturally without harming the environment.
- **Chemical-free** - No additives or plastics used in the process of manufacturing.
- They are biodegradable and is widely used in green catering and sustainable packaging.
- **FDA's Concern** - On May 8, 2025, the **U.S. FDA** issued an import alert restricting biodegradable dinnerware **made from areca nut leaf sheaths**.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services responsible for regulating food safety and approving drugs and medical devices.

- The FDA cited **unverified concerns** that **naturally occurring alkaloids** present in the leaf sheath.
- It might contaminate into food and pose potential health risks to consumers.

- However, **scientists and experts** from India argue that:
 - These claims are **ambiguous** and **lack scientific backing**.
 - No concrete evidence has been provided proving any **toxic migration** or **harmful effects**.
- The dinnerware is widely used in India and exported globally without health incidents.
- Experts demand that the FDA either **define safe alkaloid thresholds** or allow Indian products to meet **standardized testing criteria**.
- **Industry and economic impact** - India is a leading global producer of areca-based dinnerware.
- The global market is currently valued at **Rs420 million (Rs3,500 crore)**.
- India's share is approximately **Rs2,500 crore**, and the market is projected to **double by 2030**.
- The industry supports over 600 entrepreneurs and startups and thousands of skilled workers in Karnataka.
- It is a culturally rooted, eco-friendly industry contributing to sustainable rural livelihoods.
- The alert affects Indian exports, farmers, entrepreneurs, and eco-startups.

Reference

[The Hindu | US curb on biodegradable dinnerware](#)

Tropical Cyclones & Infant Mortality Rate

Prelims: Geography | Health | Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

Recent research has revealed a significant rise in infant mortality in low—and middle-income countries following exposure to tropical cyclones, including those below hurricane or typhoon strength.

- It highlights an urgent need for stronger disaster response measures and child health protections, particularly as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of severe weather events.
- The study found that infants exposed to tropical cyclones either in the womb or within their first year of life were markedly more likely to die.
- On average, infant mortality rose by 11% compared to baseline levels, an increase of **4.4 deaths per 1,000 live births**.

Infant mortality rate (IMR) refers to the number of infant deaths per 1,000 live births within the first year of life.

- The elevated risk was most acute within the first year after a storm and appeared to

subside after 2 years.

- However, the precise reasons behind the mortality rise remain unclear.
- The research also noted that the mortality increase was linked to major storms and more frequent, lower-intensity tropical storms.
- Researchers analysed nearly 1.7 million child health records across seven low- and middle-income countries.
 - Bangladesh, India, Madagascar, Cambodia, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.
- While the average increase in infant mortality was 11%, the effects varied widely between countries.
 - Bangladesh, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic experienced increases of more than **10 deaths per 1,000 births** following cyclones.
- In contrast, *little to no increase* was recorded in India, Madagascar, Cambodia, and the Philippines.
- Some countries may be helped by mountainous terrain, while others have more flood-prone areas.
- Disaster preparedness, evacuation efforts, the sturdiness of housing, and pre-existing child health conditions all likely play a role.

Reference

[Down to Earth | Tropical cyclones & IMR](#)

Raising Enrolment Rate in Government Schools

Prelims: Education | Government Policies & Interventions | Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

The Union Ministry of Education (MoE) asked at least 11 States and Union Territories to raise enrollment in government schools.

- Despite spending a large amount of money, students are moving away from government schools, which is a disturbing trend.
- The issue was pointed out to individual States in Project Approval Board (PAB) meetings to consider the Annual Work Plan and Budget under the Samagra Shiksha scheme for 2025-26.

Samagra Shiksha scheme is an integrated, centrally sponsored scheme for school education in India, encompassing all levels from pre-school to Class XII, aims to ensure universal access to quality education and equitable learning outcomes for all children.

- In Telangana, MoE has observed that the school enrolment trend in unaided schools is

steadily increasing except for the COVID-19 period of 2021-22.

- A similar trend has been observed in Uttarakhand.
- Tamil Nadu State was urged to build the government school brand to increase enrolment and make best use of the available resources.
- In Andhra Pradesh, the UDISE+ 2023-24 data suggests that enrolment in unaided schools is steadily increasing.
- In Maharashtra's the enrolment rate is reducing in both government and aided schools.
- Kerala said a similar exercise had been done there as well, when concerns were raised about the reduction of students in government and aided schools.
- A similar trend was also seen in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, Delhi, Puducherry, and Ladakh.

Reference

[The Hindu | Raise enrolment in government schools](#)

Kalanamak Rice

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance

Why in News?

The Uttar Pradesh Government, in consultation with the commerce ministry, plans to promote the export of kalanamak rice, also known as the Buddha Rice, to countries with a majority or large Buddhist populations.

- Kalanamak is a ***traditional type of paddy*** characterized by its black husk and strong aroma.
- It is regarded as a gift from Lord Buddha to the inhabitants of Sravasti during his visit to the area following his enlightenment.
- **Cultivated areas** - This traditional, non-basmati aromatic rice is cultivated in eastern Uttar Pradesh, especially in Siddharth Nagar.
 - It has been recognized as an ODOP (one district one product) item.
- Additionally, it is cultivated in 11 districts of the Terai region in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh and in Nepal.
- However, this traditional variety is susceptible to 'lodging', which contributes to its lower yield.

Lodging refers to a situation where the upper part of the plant becomes heavy due to grain development, causing the stem to weaken and the plant to fall over.

- **Benefits** - It is a nutritional powerhouse, being rich in
 - Iron and antioxidants,
 - Possessing a low glycemic index, and

- Being naturally gluten-free, which makes it a beneficial dietary option, particularly for those with diabetes.
- It is safeguarded under the ***Geographical Indication (GI) tag*** system.

Reference

[Live mint | Kalanamak Rice](#)

Quality Council of India (QCI)

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance.

Why in News?

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry recently inaugurated the new unified headquarters of the Quality Council of India (QCI) at the World Trade Centre in New Delhi.

- It is a ***non-profit autonomous organization*** registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860.
- **Established in** - 1997 through a collaboration between the Government of India and the Indian Industry.
- It is represented by three leading industry associations
 - Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM),
 - Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and
 - Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).
- **Nodal Ministry** - The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) within the ***Ministry of Commerce and Industry***.
- QCI serves as the ***national accreditation body***.
- **Aim** - It was created to establish a framework for independent third-party evaluations of products, services, and processes.
- QCI also encourages the adoption of quality standards related to
 - Quality Management Systems (ISO 14001 Series),
 - Food Safety Management Systems (ISO 22000 Series), and
 - Product Certification and Inspection Bodies through the accreditation services offered by the National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB).
- QCI plays a crucial role at the national level in promoting, adopting, and ensuring compliance with quality standards across all significant areas of activity.
- It spearheads a nationwide quality initiative through the ***National Quality Campaign***.
- **Members** - The council consists of 38 members, ensuring equal representation from the Government, Industries, and other stakeholders.
- **Boards under QCI**
 - National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL)
 - National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH)
 - National Accreditation Board for Education & Training (NABET)
 - National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB)

- National Board for Quality Promotion (NBQP).

Reference

[News on Air | Quality Council of India](#)

