UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelimbits 18-06-2025

Achievements of Rajasthan's Cash Plus Model

Prelims: Current events of National and International Importance | Governance

Why in News?

The recently released report card on Rajasthan's Cash Plus model indicated that it pushes up early breastfeeding rate, dietary diversity among new mothers.

- **Rajasthan's Cash Plus model** - India's first ***State-led pilot to converge Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)*** with Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC).
- It indicates a
  - 49% rise in early breastfeeding (now reaching 90% of newborns),
  - 44% of women being more receptive to home-based counselling,
  - 49% improvement in dietary diversity among pregnant women, and
  - 54% more women using cash specifically for nutrition.
- Through the programme, pregnant and lactating women are offered home-based and group nutrition counselling on maternal and child health and nutrition.
- The programme also includes community and social engagements to drive local behaviour change, and the use of digital media to target younger audiences and male household members.
- Meanwhile, the initiative promotes healthy dietary practices, encourages institutional healthcare utilisation, and strengthens community support systems.
- As per the survey report, 80% of women reported improved affordability and access to nutritious food, attributing this to greater household awareness and counselling support.
- **Challenges**
  - Incomplete data collection (maternal deaths),
  - Disparities in care with the large part of this densely populated State being rural and
  - Tackling poverty and lack of education cover.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)
• It augments the national Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY). • It provides financial assistance to ***pregnant and lactating women for their first living child.*** • It aims to improve the health and nutrition of mothers and their infants by offering cash incentives. • **Implemented by -** The Ministry of Women and Child Development. • The scheme provides a total of ***Rs. 5,000*** in 3 installments to eligible beneficiaries.

Reference

The Hindu | Rajasthan's cash plus model

Shipki La Pass

Prelims: Current events of National and International Importance | Geography

Why in News?

Himachal Pradesh has opened the Shipki La pass, a motorable mountain pass for domestic tourists, a step that locals hope will revitalize tourism and trade.

- It served as a vital trade route between ***India and Tibet*** (now part of China).
- Situated at an elevation of 3,930 metres above sea level, the pass has been part of documented trade since the 15th century.
- The communities of Kinnaur, particularly those from Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, share a deep-rooted cultural and economic relationship with Tibetan counterparts.
- Historically, the Bushahr State (now Rampur) in India and Guge in Tibet were principal players in the region's trade.
- **Imports** – Imports from Tibet included wool, pack and saddle horses, goats, sheep, mutton, yak and goatskins, yak hair, devotional items such as prayer wheels, thangkas, rosaries, and bowls, as well as borax, turquoise, and gold.
- **Exports** - Exports to Tibet from India included grains such as barley, wheat, rice, millet, lentils, chickpeas, and oil, dried fruits, vegetables, spices, tobacco, timber, copper and brass utensils, and iron tools.
- Gold and turquoise were particularly cherished, which were integral to traditional Kinnauri women's jewellery, creating constant local demand and sustaining artisan communities.
- These exchanges weren't just transactional; they shaped cultural practices, local crafts, and even dietary habits across generations.
- **Cultural connection -** The people on both sides are primarily pastoralists.
- Upper Kinnaur and the adjacent Tibetan region predominantly follow Buddhism, sustaining a spiritual and civilizational continuity even in the face of political divisions.
- Monastic traditions, festivals, and oral lore reflect a shared heritage that survives despite barriers of nationhood.
- **Recent intervention -** The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh inaugurated tourism access to Shipki La without the previously mandatory permit system.
- Indian tourists can now visit using just their Aadhaar card, a move that has stirred optimism across the region.
- The commodities exchanged between India and Tibet through Shipki La were both diverse and valuable.

Reference

The Hindu | What is the significance of the Shipki La pass?

Flue gas desulphurisation units

Prelims: Current events of National and International Importance

Why in News?

The committee of experts has recommended that India do away with a decade-long policy of mandating Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) units in all coal-fired thermal power plants (TPPs).

- **Flue Gas** - Flue gas is emitted as a byproduct of combustion of fossil fuels.
- It mainly contains pollutants such as carbon dioxide (CO2), sulphur dioxide (SO2), nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, etc.
- FGD units specifically target the SO2 emissions in flue gas.
- SO2 is an acidic gas, and is usually treated with a basic compound in the FGD unit to neutralise the pollutant.
- **Types of FDGs** - Dry sorbent injection, wet limestone treatment, and using seawater to remove SO2.
- The dry sorbent injection method involves adding a powdered sorbent like limestone to the flue gas, where it reacts with SO2.
- The resultant compound can be removed by using an electrostatic precipitator, or a fabric filter.
- The wet limestone treatment method also uses limestone to remove SO2, but instead of using it in a powdered form, it uses a limestone slurry.
- Passing SO2 through this slurry results in the formation of gypsum, which is a stable compound and has wide applications in industries like construction.
- This is the commonly used technology, and has very high efficiency.
- Sea water treatment is used in plants located near coastal areas.
- Sea water first absorbs SO2 from flue gas, and then the water is treated to make it suitable to be discharged back into the sea.

• SO2 is one of the major greenhouse gases that cause global warming, and can cause respiratory problems in humans.
• Sulphur dioxide can also lead to the formation of other oxides of sulphur in the atmosphere, which can in turn react with other compounds to form particulate matter.
• It has been established in several modelling studies that 15% of India's ambient PM2.5 is attributable to coal.
• A significant share of this (80%) is in turn attributable to secondary particulate matter formed from the SO2 that is released when coal is burned.

- **Status of FGD units in India** - In 2015, the Union Environment Ministry issued a policy that mandated all 537 coal-fired TPPs in India to install FGD units to reduce SO2 emissions.
- Further, it has extended to 2027, 2028, and 2029, respectively, depending on the category of the thermal power plant. It takes around 2 years to install an FGD unit.
- **Alternative to FGD -** There is no alternative to FGDs itself to remove SO2 that is released from the burning of coal.

- Washing of coal does not remove the sulphur that is embedded within the physical structure of the coal.

Reference

The Hindu | What are flue gas desulphurisation units?

UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

Prelims: Current events of National and International Importance | Heritage

Why in News?

Lucknow has been officially nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as a City of Gastronomy, a title currently held by only one other Indian city, Hyderabad.

UNESCO Creative Cities Network

- **Created in** – 2004.
- **Aim -** To promote cooperation among cities that have identified ***creativity as a strategic factor*** for sustainable urban development.
- To promote UNESCO's goals of cultural diversity and strengthen resilience to threats such as climate change, rising inequality, and rapid urbanisation.
- **Focus on Creativity -** The network emphasizes the role of creativity and cultural industries in urban development, promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing among member cities.
- **Creative Fields** - Architecture, Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, and Music.
- **Sustainable Development** - UCCN aims to support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly through local implementation of the *2030 Agenda*.
- Currently, there are ***almost 300 cities*** from around 90 countries in the network.
- **Indian Cities in the UCCN -** Kozhikode (Literature) and Gwalior (Music) feature in this list.
- Earlier, Jaipur (Crafts and Folk Arts), Varanasi (Music), Chennai (Music), Mumbai (Film), Hyderabad (Gastronomy), and Srinagar (Crafts and Folk Arts) have also held the spot.

Reference

Times of India | UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

Goan Feni

Prelims: Current events of National and International Importance

Why in News?

Goan Feni, also known as Ozzo Feni, has recently been granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

- Feni is a traditional Indian spirit ***native to Goa.***
- It is made from the ***fermentation and double distillation of either cashew apples or coconut sap.***
- It is a strong, clear liquor with a unique flavour.
- **History -** The Portuguese missionaries brought the cashew plant trees to Goa and in the 1600s and introduced the cashew apple to the region.
- They also introduced the method of distillation, which was then passed on to the locals.
- The people who made feni were called bhatikars, who used earthen pots or bhatis under a fire.
- Today, copper pots under the coil method are used to make Feni.
- The juice is fermented naturally for 72 hours, and then distilled twice.
- **Process -** As per a study, cashew feni production is a four-step process consisting of
    - The harvesting of cashew apples,
    - Juice extraction through stomping with feet,
    - Natural fermentation in earthen pots, and
    - Subsequent distillation and condensation in a clay still over a low wood fire.
- The distilled Feni is then aged for a couple of months and bottled.

Reference

Times of India | Goan Feni