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Jordan Becomes First Country to Receive WHO Verification for Eliminating Leprosy

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Context:

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has officially recognized **Jordan** as the first country globally to **eliminate leprosy**, marking a significant milestone in public health.

What is Leprosy?

- **About:**
- Leprosy, also known as **Hansen's disease**, is a **chronic infectious disease** caused by a type of bacteria called "***Mycobacterium leprae***".
- The disease affects the **skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces** of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes.
- Leprosy is known to occur at **all ages ranging from early childhood to old age**.
- Leprosy is not inherited, but it is **transmitted via droplets, from the nose and mouth**, during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.
- It is not highly contagious. More than 85% infected population are non-infectious, and more than 99% population has natural immunity to leprosy.
- **Incubation period:** Usually takes **about 3-5 years for symptoms to appear**.
- **Symptoms:** **Nerve damage** in **arms, legs, and skin**; **loss of sensation** in the body; **weakness of muscles**; and poor eyesight.
- **Treatment:** It can be cured by Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT). Currently, the treatment regime consists of Dapsone, Rifampicin, and Clofazimine.
- Leprosy is a **leading cause of permanent physical disability** and has been classified as one of the **Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD)**.

World Anti-Leprosy Day is observed internationally on the **last Sunday of January** to commemorate the **death of Gandhiji**.

- **India and Leprosy:**
- India has achieved the **elimination of leprosy as a public health problem** as per WHO criteria of less than **1 case per 10,000 population at the National level in 2005**.
- Leprosy is **endemic in several states and union territories of India**.
- The prevalence rate of leprosy is 0.4 per 10,000 population in the country.

GoI Initiatives for Eradication of Leprosy

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National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP)

- It is a **centrally sponsored scheme** under the **National Health Mission**.
- **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.**
- **Vision:** Leprosy-free India.
- **Implementation:** While the strategies and plans are formulated centrally, they are implemented by the States/UTs.

Nikusth 2.0 Portal

- It is an **integrated portal** for **leprosy case management** under the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP).
- It will aid in **efficient data recording, analyzing and reporting** of the data in the form of indicators and a real-time dashboard at centre, state, and district levels.

National Strategic Plan & Roadmap for Leprosy (2023-27)

- The **strategy and roadmap will aid in advancing the campaign against leprosy**, to *stop transmission*, by *speeding case detection* efforts and *maintaining a robust surveillance* infrastructure.
- India has set the target of **Leprosy Mukh Bharat by 2027, 3 years ahead of the SDG**.

SLACs (Sparsh Leprosy Awareness Campaigns)

- **Launched in 2017** to raise awareness regarding leprosy.
- Focuses on **addressing issues related to stigma and discrimination associated with leprosy**.

Global Initiatives for Eradication of Leprosy

- **WHO's Global Leprosy Strategy** 2021–2030 aims to reinvigorate leprosy control efforts and avert disabilities, especially among children.
- UN General Assembly Resolution on the **Elimination of Discrimination against Persons affected by Leprosy**, 2010: It calls on governments to modify or abolish existing laws that discriminate against persons affected by Leprosy and their family members.
- **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, 2007 aims to promote full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

SDG Target 3.3:

- End epidemics of AIDS, **tuberculosis, malaria**, combat **hepatitis**, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases by 2030.
- Focus extends to **Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)**, encompassing issues like **leprosy**.

NPS Vatsalya scheme

Context:

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman officially launched the **NPS Vatsalya scheme** in line with the announcement made in the Union Budget 2024.

NPS Vatsalya scheme:

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- The NPS Vatsalya is **an extension of the existing National Pension Scheme but focuses on children..**
- Managed by the **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)**, the scheme will be **focused on children and the investment made in this account will be to ensure long-term wealth.**
- Under the scheme, **parents can start saving for their child's retirement fund.**
- It functions **similarly to the current NPS**, which assists people in building a retirement fund by contributing consistently throughout the course of their careers
- In contrast to conventional fixed-income alternatives, **NPS contributions are invested in market-linked securities like equities and bonds**, which could **yield higher returns.**

National Pension System (NPS):

- It is a **retirement benefit scheme** introduced by the Government of India to facilitate regular income post-retirement for all subscribers
- It was launched on **1st January, 2004**. Initially, NPS was introduced for the new government recruits (except the armed forces)
- With effect from 1st May, 2009, NPS has been provided for all citizens of the country, including the unorganized sector workers on a voluntary basis.

• Eligibility for NPS Vatsalya as follows

- All **minor citizens** (age below 18 years).
- Both the child and the parent must be **Indian citizens**. All parties must comply with the **Know Your Customer (KYC)** requirements.
- **Account can be opened** in the **name of a minor** and operated by parent or guardian. Minor will be the beneficiary.
- Scheme can be opened through various **Points of presence** regulated by Pension Fund Regulatory Authority of India (PFRDA) such as **major banks, India Post, Pension Funds** and Online platform (e-NPS).
- **Contribution:** Subscriber to make a **minimum contribution of Rs 1000/-** per annum. There is **no limit** on the **maximum contribution.**

Withdrawal rules

- **After three years** of opening the NPS Vatsalya account, **partial withdrawals are allowed**. Up to **25% of the corpus** can be withdrawn for **specific purposes, including education, medical treatment for certain illnesses, or disabilities over 75%.**
- Once the child attains the **age of 18**, the corpus of **up to Rs 2.5 lakh can be withdrawn** entirely and if it exceeds, the 20% can be withdrawn and the rest 80% can be used for annuity purchase in the NPS.
- In the unfortunate event of a **subscriber's death**, the **entire corpus is given to the nominee**, usually the guardian. If the guardian dies, a new guardian must be assigned after completing a new KYC.
- If **both parents die**, a **legal guardian can manage the account without further contributions** until the child turns 18.

Rubber Board

Why in news?

The **Rubber Board** will **unveil a portal in a week to register exporters of natural rubber** and products made of natural rubber.

About Rubber Board–

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- The Rubber Board is a **statutory body** constituted by the Government of India, under the **Rubber Act 1947**, for the overall development of the rubber industry in the country.
- The **Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India**, established the Rubber Board in 1947 to **strengthen the development of the rubber industry** by offering *financial assistance, consolatory and regulatory services*.
- Head Office is in **Kottayam, Kerala**.
- The **Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII)** established in **1955** is located on a hillock in the eastern suburb of **Puthuppally, Kottayam**.
- There are nine research disciplines, seven Regional Research Stations, two Hevean Breeding Sub-stations and a Central Experimental Station attached to the RRII.
- The Institute is headed by the **Director** (Research).
- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): 100% FDI in plantations of rubber, coffee, tea, cardamom, palm oil tree and olive oil tree.**

Rubber–

- India is currently the **sixth largest producer of NR in the world** with one of the highest productivity (**694,000 tonnes in 2017-18**).
- **Traditional rubber-growing states** comprising **Kerala and Tamil Nadu account for 81%** of production.
- Major **non-traditional rubber growing regions** are the **North Eastern states of Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, Odisha, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West Bengal**.
- Due to the major spike in the rubber consumption and deficit in the NR production in India, around **40% of NR is imported from other major rubber producing countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and China**.

Conditions required for the growth of Rubber tree

- Rubber is **made from the latex of a tree** called **Hevea Brasiliensis**, The **British** established the **first rubber plantation in India in 1902** on the banks of the **river Periyar in Kerala**.
- Rubber is a **tropical tree**.
- It requires high **temperature throughout the year** – ranging **between 20°-35°C** or average **monthly mean of 27°C**. Less than 20°C temperature is detrimental.
- Similarly, rubber also requires **heavy rainfall**. The rainfall should be well-distributed throughout the year.
- Rubber trees can grow in **a wide range of soils, including clay, sand and loam**. They can tolerate both acidic and alkaline soils, but need good drainage.

National Rubber policy

- The National Rubber Policy includes several **provisions to support the Natural Rubber (NR) production sector** and the entire rubber industry value chain.
- The Policy covers

new planting and replanting of rubber,

support for growers,

processing and marketing of natural rubber,

labour shortage,

grower forums,

external trade,

Centre-State integrated strategies,

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research, training,

rubber product manufacturing and export,

climate change concerns and carbon market

- National Rubber Policy is based on the short term and long term strategies identified by the **Task Force constituted on the rubber sector** for mitigating problems faced by rubber growers in the country.
- The Task Force held extensive consultations with various stakeholders of rubber sector.
- The policy is expected to **benefit natural rubber growers and promote the natural rubber production** sector.
- **Developmental and research activities for supporting Natural Rubber** sector for the welfare of growers are carried out through Rubber Board by implementing the scheme Sustainable and Inclusive Development of Natural Rubber Sector in the Medium Term Framework (MTF).
- The developmental activities **include financial and technical assistance for planting**, supply of quality planting materials, support for grower forums, training and skill development programme.