

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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—It's about quality—

Scientists in India have achieved a breakthrough in treating severe hemophilia A with gene therapy.

- This success offers hope for a one-time, potentially more affordable solution to this rare genetic bleeding disorder.
- The new approach could significantly improve the lives of thousands of patients in India and globally.

Indian scientists develop novel gene therapy for haemophilia

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Scientists in India have reported success with using gene therapy to treat severe haemophilia A, a rare hereditary condition resulting from a faulty gene which triggers severe, spontaneous, and potentially fatal bleeding episodes.

Though only tested on five patients in Tamil Nadu so far, none of them have reported bleeding episodes over an average follow-up period of 14 months. It is not unusual for those with haemophilia to have weekly bleeding episodes, requiring frequent treatment. The results of the study were reported in the peer-reviewed *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM) earlier this week.

The trial was led by Alok Srivastava of the Centre for Stem Cell Research (CSCR) at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, and financially supported by the Union Department of Biotechnology.

One-time solution

The typical treatment for the condition requires injections at frequent intervals, with infusions of a "clotting factor" to prevent bleeding. Gene therapy treatments, however, promise to be a one-time solution. A gene introduced into the body teaches it to create enough of the clotting factor that can prevent such haemorrhage.

Haemophilia can be classified as minor or severe depending on the percentage of clotting factor present in those afflicted. Haemophilia A, the more



Costly affair: Per-patient cost of treating haemophilia in India is reported to be ₹2.54 crore over a 10-year period. GETTY IMAGES

common version of the condition, is caused by the absence of a blood-clotting factor called Factor VIII. Even though haemophilia is a rare disorder, India has the world's second-largest patient pool, with an estimated 40,000 to 1,00,000 patients.

Those with Severe Hemophilia A have less than

1% of the clotting factor, and manage the condition with repeated Factor VIII replacement, monoclonal antibodies, or injecting substances that mimic Factor VIII to stop or prevent bleeding.

Because of the nature of the condition and the relatively low numbers of patients, treatment can be ex-

pensive. A March 2024 research study in the journal *Heliyon* estimates the per-patient cost of treating a haemophilia patient in India to be \$3,00,000 (or ₹2.54 crore) over a 10-year period.

There is only one gene therapy – Roctavian – which was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for commercial use in 2023. Its effectiveness was established based on results from a cohort of 112 patients followed up for at least three years after Roctavian treatment. Following the infusion, the average bleeding incidents decreased from 5.4 bleeds per year at baseline to 2.6 bleeds per year.

The majority of patients who received Roctavian also received corticosteroids to suppress their immune systems for the gene thera-

py to be effective and safe, according to the U.S. FDA.

Roctavian works by transporting the therapeutic gene into the body by using an adenovirus as a carrier or vector and involves the liver in producing Factor VIII.

The new approach, the authors say in their paper, is safer than using an adenovirus, and potentially opens up the gene therapy treatment to children.

An independent expert described the study as "ground-breaking".

"This ground-breaking study is notable for several reasons. First, it establishes that initiating and executing studies involving new gene therapy is possible even in resource-constrained settings such as India," said Johnny Mahlan-gu, in an editorial in the NEJM.

Analysis of the news:

- Gene therapy trial in India successfully treats severe hemophilia A, a bleeding disorder.
- Five patients treated in Tamil Nadu have remained free of bleeding episodes for over a year. Typically, these patients experienced frequent, potentially fatal bleeds.
- This gene therapy could be a one-time solution for hemophilia A, unlike current treatments requiring frequent injections.
- The new approach is safer than traditional methods and may be suitable for children.
- It could lead to more affordable treatment in India, where conventional hemophilia care is very expensive.

What is the new therapy?

- **Target:** Addresses the root cause of severe hemophilia A by providing a functional copy of the faulty gene that prevents the body from producing a crucial blood clotting factor (Factor VIII).
- **Delivery:** Uses a harmless carrier, or vector, to deliver the therapeutic gene into the patient's body. This vector is likely a modified virus that cannot cause disease.

Daily News Analysis

- **Production:** Once inside the body, the gene instructs the patient's cells to produce Factor VIII, enabling normal blood clotting.
- **One-time treatment:** This approach aims to be a one-time solution, unlike current treatments that require regular injections of clotting factors.
- **Safer alternative:** The specific vector used in this trial is believed to be safer than traditional adenovirus-based vectors, potentially making it suitable for children as well.

Hemophilia A

- **Genetic disorder:** Hemophilia A is typically inherited, caused by a faulty gene on the X chromosome.
- **Blood clotting deficiency:** Leads to a deficiency in Factor VIII, a protein essential for blood clotting.
- **Bleeding episodes:** People with hemophilia A experience prolonged or excessive bleeding, even from minor injuries.
- **Severity:** Ranges from mild to severe, depending on the level of Factor VIII in the blood.
- **Treatment:** Traditionally managed with frequent injections of Factor VIII to prevent or stop bleeding.
- **Prevalence:** A rare disorder, but India has a significant number of patients.
- **Complications:** Can include joint damage, internal bleeding, and life-threatening hemorrhages.

Page 04: GS 2 : Indian Polity – Judiciary

The Opposition has started efforts to move an impeachment motion against Allahabad High Court judge Shekhar Kumar Yadav for his controversial statements at a recent Vishwa Hindu Parishad event.

- The notice needs the endorsement of 50 MPs in the Rajya Sabha to be considered by the Chairman or 100 MPs in the Lok Sabha to be taken up as an impeachment motion in the Lok Sabha.

Opposition plans motion to impeach Uttar Pradesh judge

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Opposition has started efforts to move an impeachment motion against Allahabad High Court judge Shekhar Kumar Yadav for his controversial statements at a recent Vishwa Hindu Parishad event.

Independent MP and senior lawyer Kapil Sibal has initiated the work to submit separate notices to both Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to impeach Justice Yadav. The notice needs the endorsement of 50 MPs in the Rajya Sabha to be considered by the Chairman or 100 MPs in the Lok Sabha to be taken up as an impeachment motion in the Lok Sabha.

An Opposition MP told



Shekhar Kumar Yadav

The Hindu that the notices would be moved in a day or two.

“We are preparing the notices for both the Houses. So far, we have received about 40 signatures from the Rajya Sabha. More than 100 MPs from the Lok Sabha are also willing to sign the notice. Mr. Sibal is in touch with MPs across political parties,” he said.

Parliament has considered five impeachment notices in the past, including against Justice Soumitra Sen. If the notices are

accepted either by the Chairman or by the Speaker, an investigation committee is formed with three members – the Chief Justice or other judges of the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice of a High Court, and a distinguished jurist. The next step will be based on this report by the expert panel.

“In case the notices of motion are given on the same day in both the Houses, the committee will be constituted only if the motion has been admitted in both the Houses and thereupon jointly by the Speaker and the Chairman. In case notices of motion are given in both the Houses on different dates, the notice that is given later shall stand rejected,” says a note prepared by the Lok Sabha.

Removal of High Court Judges in India

Grounds for Removal:

- Proved misbehavior or incapacity.
- Misuse of office, grave offenses undermining a judge's integrity.
- Contravention of the Constitution's provisions.

Procedure:

- **Motion:** 100 members of Lok Sabha or 50 members of Rajya Sabha can raise a motion for removal.
- **Admission:** The Speaker/Chairman decides whether to admit the motion.

Daily News Analysis

- ➡ **Inquiry Committee:** If admitted, an Inquiry Committee is formed, comprising:
 - A Supreme Court Judge
 - A High Court Chief Justice
 - A distinguished jurist
- ➡ **Investigation:** The committee investigates the charges against the judge.
- ➡ **Report:** The committee submits its report to the Speaker/Chairman.
- ➡ **Parliamentary Consideration:** If the committee finds the judge guilty, the motion is considered by each House of Parliament.
- ➡ **Special Majority:** Removal requires a special majority:
 - Majority of the total membership of that House.
 - Majority of not less than two-thirds of members present and voting.
- ➡ **Presidential Order:** After the address is passed by both Houses, the President issues an order for the judge's removal.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The process for removal of High Court judges in India, though enshrined in the Constitution, is often perceived as complex and challenging. Critically analyze this statement, highlighting the key procedural hurdles and their implications for judicial accountability. **(250 Words /15 marks)**

The WHO released its World Malaria Report for 2024, highlighting global trends and regional progress in combating malaria.

- While global progress has stalled, the South-East Asia region, particularly India, has shown significant improvement in reducing malaria cases and deaths.

India accounts for half of malaria cases in Southeast Asia in 2023

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The World Health Organisation (WHO) South East Asia Region contributes about 1.5% of the burden of malaria cases globally and India accounted for about half of all estimated cases in 2023, followed by Indonesia, which carried just under one-third.

Estimated malaria deaths in the region fell by 82.9%, from 35,000 in 2000 to 6,000 in 2023. Together, India and Indonesia accounted for about 88% of malaria deaths in the region.

This is according to the WHO's latest World Malaria Report (2024) released on Wednesday.

The report notes that since 2000, the WHO South-East Asia Region has made remarkable progress against malaria and esti-



Preventive mode: A health employee gives a malaria injection to a child in Abidjan of Ivory Coast in West Africa. FILE PHOTO

mated malaria cases in the region fell from 22.8 million in 2000 to 4 million in 2023 - a reduction of 82.4%.

"In the period 2022-2023, four countries achieved reductions in their malaria caseload - Bangladesh (-9.2%), India (-9.6%), Indonesia (-5.7%) and Nepal (-58.3%). Meanwhile, three countries saw case increases - Democratic People's Republic of Ko-

rea (+47.9%), Thailand (+46.4%) and Myanmar (45.1%).

In 2023, both Timor-Leste and Bhutan reported zero indigenous cases of malaria.

A reduction in case incidence of 87% was achieved between 2000 and 2023, from 17.7 to 2.3 per 1000 population at risk.

"These gains have been largely attributed to progress in India, which saw

17.7 million fewer estimated cases and a 93% decrease in case incidence since 2000," the report said.

Meanwhile, new data from the WHO revealed that an estimated 2.2 billion cases of malaria and 12.7 million deaths have been averted since 2000, but the disease remains a serious global health threat, particularly in the WHO African Region.

According to WHO's latest World malaria report, there were an estimated 263 million cases and 5,97,000 malaria deaths worldwide in 2023. This represents about 11 million more cases in 2023 compared to 2022, and nearly the same number of deaths. Meanwhile, as of November 2024, 44 countries and one territory had been certified malaria-free by WHO.

World Malaria Report for 2024:

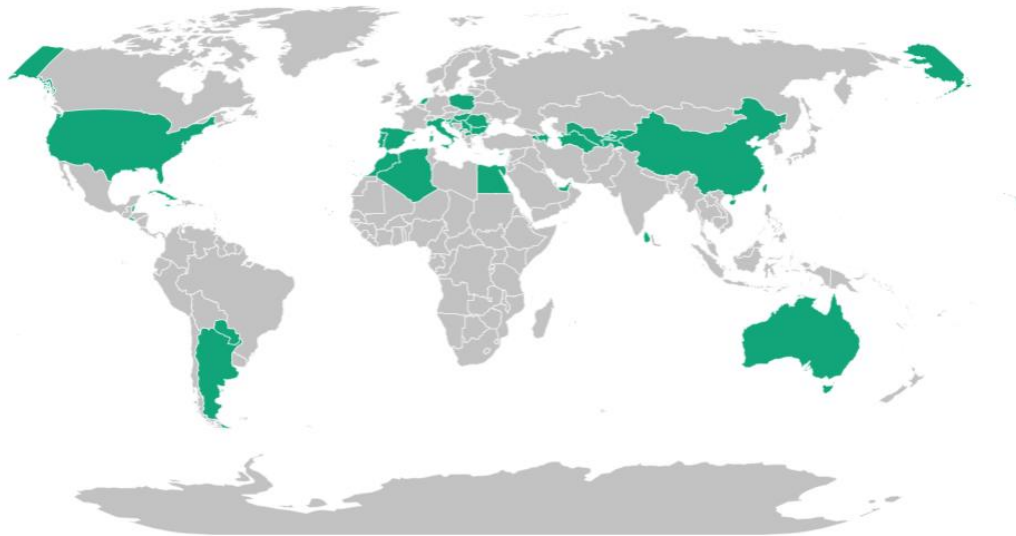
- Global malaria cases and deaths plateaued in 2023 after years of decline.
- The WHO South-East Asia Region has significantly reduced its malaria burden since 2000.

Daily News Analysis

- India and Indonesia account for most malaria cases and deaths in the region.
- Four countries in the region successfully reduced malaria cases in 2022-2023.
- Three countries saw increases in malaria cases during the same period: Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Thailand, Myanmar.
- Timor-Leste and Bhutan reported zero indigenous malaria cases in 2023.
- India's progress has significantly contributed to the region's achievements.
- Despite global progress, malaria remains a major health concern, especially in Africa.
- 44 countries and one territory are now certified malaria-free.

Countries certified as malaria-free by WHO since 1960

■ Malaria free

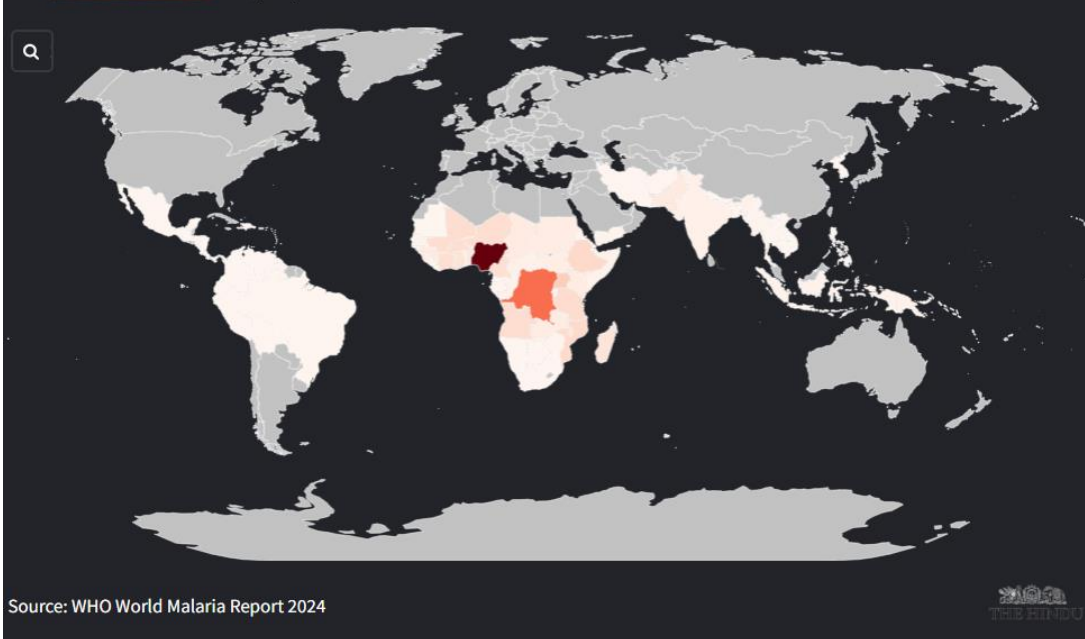


Source: WHO World Malaria Report 2024

THE HINDU

Global malaria cases in 2023

~15 ~68,136,000



UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Analyse the key findings of the World Malaria Report and their impact on global health. (250 Words /15 marks)

GEO IAS
—It's about quality—

The increasing use of space technology necessitates a critical examination of its environmental impact.

Climate impact of exploring space passing below the radar

Making satellites is an energy-intensive process. Every launch also releases carbon dioxide, black carbon, and water vapour. Rocket propellants deplete the ozone layer and disrupt atmospheric circulation. Satellites burning up in the air release ash into the atmosphere's middle layers

Shrawani Shagun

As the world becomes more reliant on space technology for vital functions like climate monitoring, the environmental consequences of space activities also become increasingly urgent and in need of more attention. The rapid growth of the number of satellites in orbit has led to concerns about interference with climate monitoring systems and the accumulation of orbital debris. With no specific international regulations addressing these challenges, it is crucial the world's governments act quickly to ensure space exploration doesn't drift into unsustainability.

How rockets affect the environment

Every rocket launch releases carbon dioxide, black carbon, and water vapour into the atmosphere. Black carbon is of particular concern because it absorbs sunlight 500 times more effectively than carbon dioxide does, amplifying global warming. As commercial space ventures become more common, the cumulative impact of these emissions will worsen.

Rocket propellants, especially those using chlorine-based chemicals, deplete the ozone layer at high altitudes, increasing exposure to ultraviolet radiation on the ground as well as disrupting atmospheric circulation – both of which affect the global climate. According to a December 9 article in *MIT Tech Review*, when satellites "burn up in the atmosphere" once their missions end, they release "satellite ash in the middle layers of the earth's atmosphere. This metallic ash can harm the atmosphere and potentially alter the climate."

Next, like many other forms of manufacturing, the production of satellites demands energy-intensive processes involving metals and composite materials, whose extraction and preparation have large carbon footprints of their own. Satellites also use propulsion systems to adjust their location and orientation in orbit, and their emissions add to the overall count. Equally, the rise of space mining – e.g. extracting valuable (on the earth) minerals from asteroids – could lead to increased industrial activity both in space and on the ground. Such mining activities haven't begun yet, but they are sure to be part of the future.

While space technology supports essential climate monitoring and disaster management, the environmental costs for the earth's atmosphere and space are escalating, requiring urgent redressal.

Dangers of orbital debris

Orbital debris, or space junk, refers to defunct satellites, spent rocket stages, and pieces of satellites produced when they break apart in low earth orbit (LEO).

According to the European Space Agency, as of September 2024, there had been around 6,740 rocket launches since 1957 that placed 19,590 satellites in orbit. Around 13,230 are still in space, and of them 10,200 are still functional.

Since the space in earth's orbit is a resource just like water bodies and land masses on the ground, the occupation of orbits by non-functional objects constitutes a form of pollution as well – with the added threat of risk magnification.

For example, space surveillance



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Florida. The rocket carried 23 Starlink satellites. AP

networks have catalogued around 36,860 space objects thus far, including those produced in the 650+ fragmentation events (break-ups, explosions, and collisions). The total mass of all space objects in orbit exceeds 13,000 tonnes. As this mass continues to increase, the collision risks to satellites increase as well. Most space junk can reach speeds of up to 29 km/hr. When moving so fast, even a minuscule piece of metal can smash through a satellite like a bullet, damaging critical components, including those used for communication, navigation, and to monitor climate parameters of merit.

Orbital debris also poses an indirect threat by interfering with scientists' ability to collect data about the earth – from tracking disasters to monitoring weather – from space, such as by interfering with radio waves. Such threats also obligate satellite operators to invest in shielding satellites and actively perform costly manoeuvres to avoid collisions; both requirements drive up mission cost.

The risks are even more significant for human-crewed missions. For example, the International Space Station frequently adjusts its orbit to avoid debris.

Barriers to space sustainability

Regulation is key to ensuring space remains accessible and space activities remain environmentally sustainable. Without clear guidelines, the unchecked growth of emissions and debris will harm the earth's climate and increase the barriers to future space exploration.

Space activities currently fall outside international sustainability instruments like the Paris Agreement, so governments need to establish standards for emissions from rockets and satellites to prevent them from becoming overlooked contributors to global warming.

Without regulations, the increasing number of satellites and debris will overcrowd LEO, rendering future missions more expensive, which in turn would subtract from space's identity as a shared global resource that needs to be

The mass of objects in orbit exceeds 13,000 tonnes. As this increases, the collision risks increase as well. Most space junk can reach speeds of up to 29 km/hr. Even a minuscule piece can smash through a satellite

equally accessible to everyone. International cooperation through bodies like the Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space (COPUOS) is necessary to create enforceable standards in this context.

Governments can also ensure such frameworks align with the Outer Space Treaty's principles of responsible use of space while addressing the treaty's current lack of binding provisions. This unity is particularly crucial if countries are to address the environmental impacts of space activities.

Achieving sustainability

Achieving sustainability in space exploration requires innovative solutions, which also present challenges of their own. For example, reusable rockets like those developed by SpaceX and Blue Origin reduce manufacturing waste and lower costs by allowing engineers to reuse rocket components in multiple missions. But the reusable parts are often heavier, which increases fuel consumption. These also have limited applicability for high-orbit missions, and their wear and tear invokes costly refurbishments. Thus scaling this technology while maintaining efficiency remains a hurdle.

Second, transitioning to cleaner fuels like liquid hydrogen and/or biofuels can minimise harmful emissions during liftoffs. However, hydrogen is currently produced with non-renewable energy, negating its environmental benefits. Cryogenic fuels – which provide more thrust for the same mass – are more expensive and more complex to handle, keeping them out of reach of smaller

operators. Electric propulsion is another option, but its low thrust restricts its use to specific missions like in-orbit manoeuvres.

Third, designing satellites with biodegradable materials that naturally disintegrate during re-entry can prevent long-term debris accumulation. On the flip side, these materials currently lack the durability required for the extreme conditions of space. High development costs and limited adoption further slow progress. Autonomous debris removal (ADR) technologies such as robotic arms and laser systems also offer hope for cleaning up orbital debris, but again, they are currently expensive as well as need more legal clarity before they can begin to operate safely.

A global traffic system to monitor satellites and debris in real time could reduce collisions and optimise orbit use. Resistance to data sharing, including due to security and commercial concerns, and the lack of a unified international authority hinder its development, however.

None of these hurdles are permanent, of course. Moreover, whereas individual solutions face significant challenges, a combined approach may be more feasible.

For example, binding agreements through COPUOS can standardise emission limits, debris mitigation, and data-sharing practices; governments and private entities can prioritise funding for green technologies, ADR systems, and satellite biodegradability; and financial rewards, subsidies, or penalties can nudge private actors towards sustainable practices.

At the intersection of technological advancement and environmental responsibility, the choices we make today will define the future of space exploration.

(Shrawani Shagun is pursuing a PhD at National Law University, Delhi, focusing on environmental sustainability and space governance. shrawani.shagun@gmail.com)

Daily News Analysis

- Without proper regulation and sustainable practices, these factors threaten the future of space exploration and Earth's climate.
- International cooperation and innovative solutions are crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of space activities.

The Environmental Cost of Space Exploration

- The increasing reliance on space technology for vital functions like climate monitoring necessitates urgent action to address the environmental impact of space activities.
- The growing number of satellites in orbit and the frequency of rocket launches contribute to atmospheric pollution and the accumulation of orbital debris, posing risks to the sustainability of space activities and our ability to monitor Earth's climate.

How Rockets Affect the Environment

- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Rockets release CO₂, black carbon, and other greenhouse gases, contributing to climate change. Black carbon is particularly harmful due to its high sunlight absorption.
- **Ozone Layer Depletion:** Some rocket propellants contain chlorine-based chemicals that damage the ozone layer, increasing our exposure to harmful UV radiation.
- **Atmospheric Pollution:** Solid rocket boosters release chlorine and aluminum oxide, which can linger in the atmosphere and potentially contribute to ozone depletion.
- **Space Debris:** Inactive satellites, spent rocket stages, and fragments from collisions pose a risk of collision with active satellites and spacecraft.
- **Resource Depletion:** Manufacturing rockets and satellites requires significant resources and energy, contributing to environmental strain on Earth.
- **Light and Noise Pollution:** Rocket launches generate significant light and noise pollution, affecting local communities and wildlife.
- **Impact on Upper Atmosphere:** Rocket exhaust plumes can create artificial clouds and alter the chemical composition of the upper atmosphere.

Dangers of Orbital Debris

- **Collision Risks:** Space junk, including defunct satellites and fragments from collisions, poses a significant collision risk to operational satellites.
- **Magnitude:** Over 36,860 objects are in orbit, including debris from over 650 fragmentation events. The total mass exceeds 13,000 tonnes.
- **Impact on Data Collection:** Debris can interfere with instruments used to collect data about Earth, hindering weather monitoring and scientific research.
- **Increased Mission Costs:** Avoiding collisions requires costly maneuvers and shielding, increasing the expense of space missions.
- **Risk to Human-crewed Missions:** Debris poses a risk to the International Space Station, which frequently adjusts its orbit to avoid collisions.

Barriers to Space Sustainability

Daily News Analysis

- ➡ **Lack of International Regulations:** The absence of specific international regulations addressing the environmental impact of space activities hinders efforts to mitigate emissions, manage debris, and ensure responsible use of space. This regulatory gap needs to be addressed to promote sustainable practices.
- ➡ **Technological Challenges:** Solutions like reusable rockets, cleaner fuels, biodegradable materials, and debris removal technologies hold promise but face challenges related to cost, efficiency, and technological maturity. Overcoming these challenges requires further research and development.

Achieving Sustainability

- ➡ **Global Cooperation:** International cooperation is crucial to establish enforceable standards for emissions, debris mitigation, and data sharing. Organizations like the Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space (COPUOS) can play a vital role in developing and implementing these standards.
- ➡ **Investment in Green Technologies:** Governments and private companies must prioritize funding for research and development of sustainable technologies, including green propellants, debris removal systems, and biodegradable materials for satellites.
- ➡ **Policy Incentives:** Financial incentives, such as subsidies and tax breaks, can encourage private companies to adopt sustainable practices. Conversely, penalties can discourage unsustainable behavior.

Conclusion

- ➡ The future of space exploration depends on our ability to balance technological advancement with environmental responsibility.
- ➡ By promoting international cooperation, investing in green technologies, and implementing effective regulations, we can ensure that space activities remain sustainable.

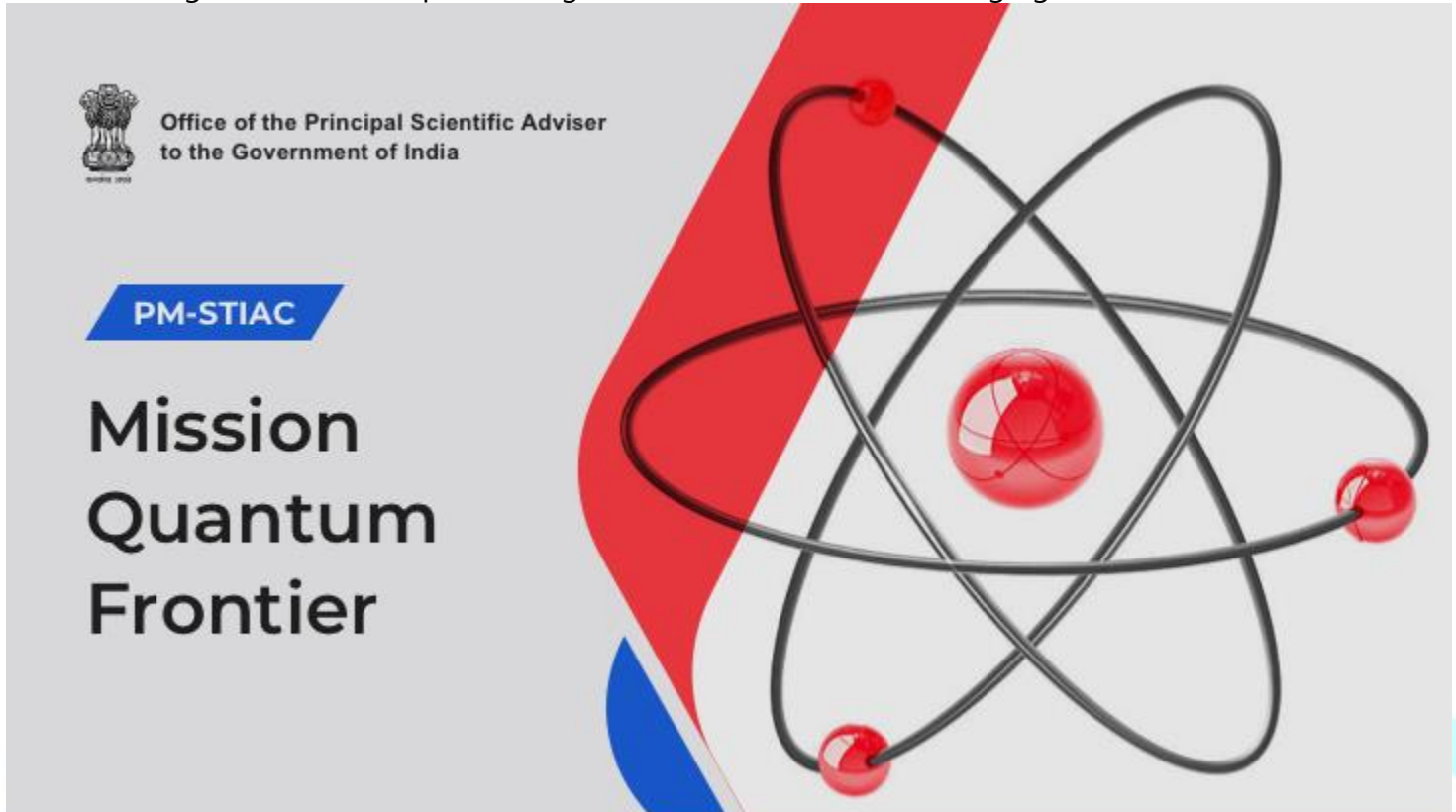
UPSC Mains practice Question

Ques : What is India's plan to have its own space station and how will it benefit our space programme?
(150 words/10m)

In News : National Quantum Mission

India is investing heavily in quantum technology with its National Quantum Mission.

- This initiative aims to advance research and development in quantum computing, communication, sensing, and materials, positioning India as a leader in this emerging field.



National Quantum Mission (NQM)

Overview

- Aims to advance India's capabilities in quantum technology across various domains.
- Approved with a budget of Rs. 6003.65 crores.

Objectives

- **Quantum Computing:**
 - Develop intermediate-scale quantum computers with increasing qubit capacity (20-50, 50-100, 50-1000) using superconducting and photonic technologies.
- **Quantum Communication:**
 - Establish satellite-based secure quantum communication within India (2000 km range) and with other countries.
 - Develop inter-city quantum key distribution (2000 km) with trusted nodes.
 - Create a multi-node quantum network with quantum memories and repeaters.
- **Quantum Sensing & Metrology:**
 - Develop highly sensitive magnetometers and gravity measurement devices.

Daily News Analysis

- Develop atomic clocks with exceptional stability for precision timing and navigation.

➡ **Quantum Materials & Devices:**

- Design and synthesize quantum materials (superconductors, semiconductors, topological materials) for quantum devices.
- Develop single-photon sources/detectors and entangled photon sources for various applications.

Implementation

- ➡ Pan-India initiative with four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs) and 14 Technical Groups across 17 states and 2 Union Territories.
- ➡ Focuses on technology development, human resource development, entrepreneurship, and international collaborations.
- ➡ Encourages participation of female scientists from all over India.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Analyse the objective of National Quantum Mission and its relevance. **(250 words/15m)**

The long and complex road to assisted dying

On November 29, 2024, while introducing the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25 (The Assisted Dying Law) to the British House of Commons, the Member of Parliament, Kim Leadbeater told a rather distressing story of an "agonising death".

A 47-year-old music teacher with a young son, Ms. Leadbeater said, had suffered from bile duct cancer which obstructed his bowel. On his last day, this saw him vomit faecal matter for five consecutive hours, before he choked and died. The vomiting was so violent that he could not be sedated and, what is worse, he had stayed conscious through the ordeal. All the while, his wife pleaded with doctors to help. But the physicians treating him were helpless. The look of horror on his face as he died, his family say, is something that will never leave them.

Ms. Leadbeater narrated the teacher's case to illustrate the suffering that many others face from deadly illnesses, with no choice available to them to seek assistance in ending their pain. The draft law – which gives terminally-ill adults (in England and Wales), with less than six months to live, the right to die, once they have a request signed off by two doctors and a high court judge – was intensely debated. Eventually, the Bill was passed with a majority of 55 votes, with 330 members voting for it and 275 against.

In somewhat unusual circumstances, the Members of Parliament had been released from the tethers imposed on them by their party whips. They had been asked to decide as their conscience willed. As a result, what ensued was all manners of interesting voting patterns. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his Conservative predecessor Rishi Sunak voted in favour. The Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner, and the Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, rejected the draft.

The complexity of the issue

With its passing in the Commons, the proposal is now slated for review by a Public Bill Committee, which will scrutinise, fine tune, and suggest amendments to its various clauses, before it returns the draft to Parliament for an ultimate sanction. Therefore, there is still some way to go. But seeing how previous efforts, to bring about a law to allow assisted dying, have floundered, the Bill's passing represents a milestone, a victory for those who consider the right to die, when faced with an intolerable ailment, as intrinsic to human liberty.

At the same time, the sharply divergent views expressed amongst lawmakers in Britain also shows us just how complex an issue this is. The debates contain in them lessons that the rest of the world can take, in deciding how best to allow



Suhrit Parthasarathy

an advocate
practising in the
Madras High Court

people to both lead, and end, their lives, with dignity and compassion.

The opposition to the law primarily rests on two planks. First, opponents argue that the law is premised on a "slippery slope" – that it would be practically impossible to draw boundaries limiting the right to assisted death, and that the old and the disabled might be pressured into choosing to end their lives in the midst of fears that they might wind up becoming a burden on their loved ones.

Critics also claim that a similar law employed in Canada has produced worrying results. Originally, following a 2015 judgment of the country's Supreme Court, the government opened up avenues to allow assisted dying for those whose death was "reasonably foreseeable". But the law has since been expanded through judicial interpretation to make it applicable even to those facing a "grievous and irremediable medical condition". In so doing, the bright lines of the rule, the Bill's detractors say, have been dimmed.

'There are legitimate cases'

Proponents of the law counter the criticism by pointing to how the very invocation of a slippery slope suggests that those making the argument are offering a concession: that there are legitimate cases where it might be justifiable to help someone die. Moreover, the law, as drafted, they say, is carefully tailored: it only includes adults competent to make decisions, who are ailing from a terminal diagnosis and who have less than six months to live, to seek assistance in ending their lives.

Additionally, the person making the claim will be independently assessed by two doctors, with a 14-day reflection time afforded to them, and no decision will be sanctioned without the High Court's approval. Lord David Neuberger, the former President of the U.K. Supreme Court, argues that the Bill's clauses are tightly worded enough to ensure that the law respects people's right of personal autonomy, and that there really is no chance of its scope being enlarged through judicial challenge.

The second cause for opposition stems from rather more traditional, philosophical grounds, sometimes resting on considerations of religion and faith. The proposed law, these critics claim, is simply deceit disguised as compassion, and offends the inviolability of the right to life. In response, the Bill's supporters concede that in most cases, there ought to be serious objections to the taking of one's life, and to avoidably allowing people to die. In ordinary circumstances, objections founded on a person's right to life would prevail. But the conflict here, as they demonstrate, is not especially

irreconcilable. For, as Ms. Leadbeater and others have shown, the moral background in which the debate resides cannot permit a wholesale embargo on physician-assisted deaths. After all, every adult, we generally recognise, has the right to make significant decisions on how best to lead their respective lives. This freedom, grounded in the sovereignty of our bodies, may stem from religious faith or simply from conscience, but, regardless, it is something that is embedded in each of us as human beings.

The state, no doubt, owes to us a duty to ensure that we do not indulge in what Ronald Dworkin described as "irrevocable acts of self-destruction". But, equally, the exercise of this duty can under no circumstances "justify forcing a competent dying patient to live in agony a few weeks longer". To do so would impinge squarely on the freedom that each of us enjoys over our lives and bodies.

On choice and dignity

In many ways, the debates in Britain assume universal value. In India, the Supreme Court has previously recognised a limited freedom to die, a right both to passive euthanasia and a right to make an "advance medical directive" – that is a liberty to stipulate one's preferences for medical treatment, or the withdrawal thereof, should one become incapacitated in the future. In its judgment in *Common Cause (A Regd. Society) vs Union of India* (2018), the Court found this right as essential to liberty, as "an element of the privacy of the being".

The road from here to assisted dying is clearly a long one. But the reasons which compel one to hold in favour of individual dignity surely apply just as vigorously to how one might want to go about dealing with a terminal illness in their last days. The latter choice is as critical to one's dignity and independence as it is to any other decision that a person makes over her body and life.

Deliberations made in Britain's Parliament have shown us that making laws to govern assisted dying is a complicated affair. But the mere prospect of a slippery slope, or the possibility of abuse, cannot detract from the fact that at stake here is something central to human dignity – that is, the ability to allow people to make conscious choices to alleviate the most crushing forms of pain and suffering.

One can argue over the fine print of what a law that allows for assisted dying must contain. But there can be no doubt that the rudimentary principle on which such a legislation will inevitably rest is founded on ideas that are central to our existence, to our freedom to lead meaningful lives, and to the rights to privacy, dignity, and autonomy.

The intricacies involved – as the debate in the United Kingdom shows – should not detract from the fact that this is also an issue linked to dignity and the alleviation of suffering

GS Paper 02 : Social Justice – Health

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Practice Question: Critically analyze the ethical and legal dimensions of assisted dying, considering the arguments for and against its legalization. Discuss the potential implications of such legislation on individual autonomy. (250 Words /15 marks)

Context :

- The UK Parliament recently debated an assisted dying bill, sparking global discussion on end-of-life choices.
- This debate highlights the tension between respecting individual autonomy and safeguarding the sanctity of life, raising complex ethical and legal questions.
- In India, passive euthanasia and advanced medical directives are legally permissible, while assisted dying remains prohibited.

Introduction of the Assisted Dying Law

- On November 29, 2024, MP Kim Leadbeater presented the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25, also known as the Assisted Dying Law, to the British House of Commons.
- This legislation aims to provide terminally ill adults in England and Wales with less than six months to live the option of assisted death, given they have obtained the necessary approvals.
- The required approvals include signed requests from two doctors and a High Court judge.

Arguments in Favor of Assisted Dying:

- **Autonomy and Dignity:** Individuals have the right to make choices about their own lives and deaths, including the right to avoid unbearable suffering.
- **Compassion and Relief:** Assisted dying provides a compassionate option for those facing intolerable pain and suffering at the end of life.
- **Choice and Control:** It allows individuals to maintain control over the timing and manner of their death, giving them a sense of agency in their final moments.
- **Safeguards and Regulation:** Laws can be carefully crafted with safeguards to prevent abuse and ensure that assisted dying is only available to those who meet strict criteria.

Daily News Analysis

- ➡ **Respect for Individual Beliefs:** It respects the diverse beliefs and values individuals hold about life and death, allowing them to make choices aligned with their own convictions.

Arguments Against Assisted Dying:

- ➡ **Sanctity of Life:** Life is sacred and should be protected, even in the face of suffering. Assisted dying undermines the inherent value of life.
- ➡ **Slippery Slope:** Legalizing assisted dying could lead to its expansion to include vulnerable individuals who may feel pressured to end their lives.
- ➡ **Potential for Abuse:** There is a risk that assisted dying could be misused or abused, particularly in cases of coercion or undue influence.
- ➡ **Impact on Healthcare:** It may undermine the trust between patients and healthcare providers and shift the focus away from palliative care and improving end-of-life care.
- ➡ **Religious and Moral Objections:** Many religious and philosophical traditions view assisted dying as morally wrong and a violation of the natural order.

Global Relevance and Implications

- ➡ The debates surrounding assisted dying in Britain have global implications, prompting discussions about end-of-life choices and individual autonomy in various countries.
- ➡ In India, for instance, the Supreme Court has recognized a limited right to die, encompassing passive euthanasia and the right to create advance medical directives outlining preferences for medical treatment or withdrawal of treatment in case of incapacitation.
- ➡ The British deliberations highlight the complexities of legislating assisted dying while underscoring the fundamental principles of human dignity, autonomy, and the right to make choices about one's life and death.

Conclusion

- ➡ While concerns about potential abuse and unintended consequences are valid, the central principle underlying such legislation is the preservation of human dignity and the freedom to make informed choices.