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Asus, Dell, others apply for manufacturing laptops in India

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Why in news?

- As part of its renewed production linked incentive (PLI) scheme for IT hardware, the Centre has received applications from 38 entities, including the likes of Asus, Dell, HP, and Foxconn, that want to manufacture laptops, personal computers and servers in India.

- Apple, however, has opted to skip participation in the scheme.

- The development comes weeks after the Centre imposed – and then postponed – a licensing requirement on the import of laptops and personal computers, which had set alarm bells ringing at major electronics hardware manufacturers. The move was deferred until October 31.

Details

- The Centre had more than doubled the IT Hardware PLI in May this year to Rs 17,000 crore since it was first cleared in 2021 with an outlay of Rs 7,350 crore.

- The first version of the scheme was a laggard with only two companies – Dell and Bhagwati – managing to meet first year (FY22) targets, and the industry calling for a renewed scheme with an increased budgetary outlay.

- The average incentive over six years will be about 5% of net incremental sales compared with the 2% over four years offered earlier.

- Companies that locally manufacture certain components including memory modules, solid state drives and display panels will also get additional incentives under the restructured scheme.

(more ahead)

Cont'd

- There will be flexibility in choosing the base year as well. The total benefits – given the sales projections by companies – could add up to PLI of Rs 22,880 crore.

- The IT hardware manufacturing drive also seeks to penalise companies if production lags behind the set thresholds, by deducting as much as 10% from the subsidies.

- This scheme will interplay with the semiconductor scheme of the govt, with chips made in India, potentially being used by laptop manufacturers. Sourcing local components has an added incentive under the scheme.

Significance of local production for India

- Even as the country has identified electronics manufacturing as a key sector for future economic growth, India has seen an increase in imports of electronic goods and laptops/computers in the last few years. During April-June this year, the import of electronic goods increased to $6.96 billion from $4.73 billion in the year-ago period, with a share of 4-7% in overall imports.

- The highest share of imports is in the category of personal computers including laptops, and palmtops, under which imports from China stood at $558.36 million in April-May this year as against $618.26 million in the year-ago period. China accounts for roughly 70-80% of the share of India's imports of personal computers, laptops.

Companies that have applied

- Apart from Asus, Dell, HP and Foxconn, other companies that have applied for the scheme include Lenovo, Acer, and Flex, which is said to be manufacturing Reliance's JioBook laptop. HP Enterprises (HPE) has also applied for manufacturing servers in India.

- While the expected incremental production at the end of six years of the scheme is estimated at Rs 3.35 lakh crore, it could bring an incremental investment of just Rs 4,000 crore over these many years. The govt estimates the manufacturing process to result in 75,000 direct jobs.

Role of import restrictions in increased PLI applications

- A day after the import restriction was imposed, as of August 4, only two companies had applied to participate in the IT hardware PLI which was renewed in May this year, with 44 companies having registered with an intent to apply. The number of applicants jumped by another 36 after 26 days, taking the total to 38. The deadline for application was August 30.

- The chaos following the notification of the import restriction led to companies like Apple and Samsung freezing their imports until more clarity was available. Some manufacturers also had their consignments held at customs due to the immediate nature of the directive.

- Industry associations representing companies like Apple, Dell and HP, had written to the US govt criticizing the Indian govt's decision, and seeking its intervention to initiate a conversation with the Indian govt and urge it to reconsider the policy.

WFI suspended by United World Wrestling

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- In the backdrop of the wrestlers' protest over various issues, United World Wrestling (UWW), the world governing body for the sport, has provisionally suspended the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) primarily for not conducting its elections on time.

The impact

- In the absence of an elected body, Indian wrestlers and their support personnel such as coaches, assistant coach, sport physicians or masseurs will only be able to participate in UWW-sanctioned events under the UWW flag.

- This means that Indian wrestlers cannot compete under the national flag in UWW events, including the World championships in Belgrade in September. No national anthem will be played if an Indian wrestler wins a gold medal.

What caused the delay?

- As some prominent wrestlers — including Olympic medalists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik and World championship medallist Vinesh Phogat — brought allegations of sexual harassment, intimidation, financial irregularities and administrative lapse against the then WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and others and sat in protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar in January, the Union Sports Ministry asked the federation chief to step aside until an M.C. Mary Kom-headed Oversight Committee (OC) completed its enquiry.

- After the enquiry, the WFI elections were postponed until May 7. The wrestlers then returned to the protest site and demanded the arrest of Brij Bhushan. They also demanded that Brij Bhushan's family members should be stopped from contesting the elections. Brij Bhushan himself was not eligible to contest the WFI polls after completing three terms (12 years),

- As the aforesaid polls got further delayed, the UWW found sufficient grounds to suspend the WFI due to the prevailing situation for at least six months. The absence of an elected president and a board did not comply with UWW regulations and its conditions for membership. .

Scientists finally finish sequencing ‘weird’ male Y chromosome

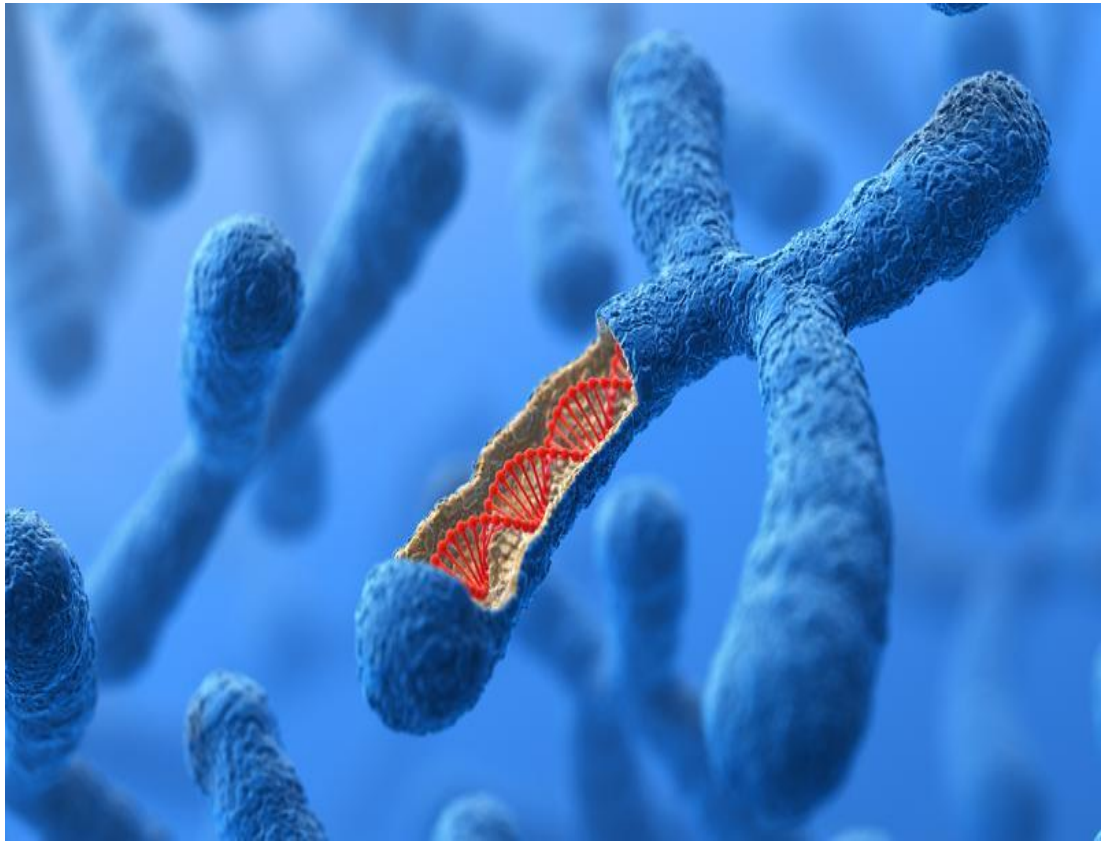
Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Why in news?

- The Y chromosome is a never-ending source of fascination (particularly to men) because it bears genes that determine maleness and make sperm. It’s also small and seriously weird; it carries few genes and is full of junk DNA that makes it horrendous to sequence.

- However, new “long-read” sequencing techniques have finally provided a reliable sequence from one end of the Y to the other.

- The findings provide a solid base to explore how genes for sex and sperm work, how the Y chromosome evolved, and whether – as predicted – it will disappear in a few million years.



Making ‘baby boys’

- It is long known that specialised chromosomes determine birth sex in humans and other mammals. Females have a pair of X chromosomes, whereas males have a single X and a much smaller Y chromosome.

- The Y chromosome is male-determining because it bears a gene called SRY, which directs the development of a ridge of cells into a testis in the embryo. The embryonic testes make male hormones, and these hormones direct the development of male features in a baby boy.

- Without a Y chromosome and a SRY gene, the same ridge of cells develops into an ovary in XX embryos. Female hormones then direct the development of female features in the baby girl.

‘A DNA junkyard’

- The Y chromosome is very different from X and the 22 other chromosomes of the human genome. It is smaller and bears few genes (only 27 compared to about 1,000 on the X).

- These include SRY, a few genes required to make sperm, and several genes that seem to be critical for life – many of which have partners on the X.

- The Y also has a lot of DNA sequences that don’t seem to contribute to traits. This “junk DNA” is comprised of highly repetitive sequences that derive from bits and pieces of old viruses, dead genes and very simple runs of a few bases repeated over and over.

Reason why the Y is 'weird'?

- There is a lot of evidence that 150 million years ago the X and Y were just a pair of ordinary chromosomes (they still are in birds and platypuses). There were two copies – one from each parent – as there are for all chromosomes.

- Then SRY evolved on one of these two chromosomes, defining a new proto-Y. This proto-Y degenerated fast, losing about 10 active genes per million years, reducing the number from its original 1,000 to just 27.

- There has been great debate about whether this degradation continues, because at this rate the whole human Y would disappear in a few million years (as it already has in some rodents).

Sequencing Y was a nightmare

- The first draft of the human genome was completed in 1999. Since then, scientists have managed to sequence all the ordinary chromosomes, including the X, with just a few gaps. They've done this using short-read sequencing, which involves chopping the DNA into little bits of a hundred or so bases and reassembling them like a jigsaw.

- But it's only recently that new technology has allowed sequencing of bases along individual long DNA molecules, producing long-reads of thousands of bases. The Y is the last human chromosome to have been sequenced end-to-end. Notably, researchers had to make several attempts in this pursuit.

What's new on the Y?

- The Y turns out to be just as weird as scientists expected from decades of gene mapping and the previous sequencing.

- Now, scientists will examine the details of Y genes. They will look for sequences that might control how SRY and the sperm genes are expressed, and to see whether genes that have X partners have retained the same functions or evolved new ones.

- Others will closely examine the repeated sequences to determine where and how they originated, and why they were amplified. Many groups will also analyse the Y chromosomes of men from different corners of the world to detect signs of degeneration, or recent evolution of function.

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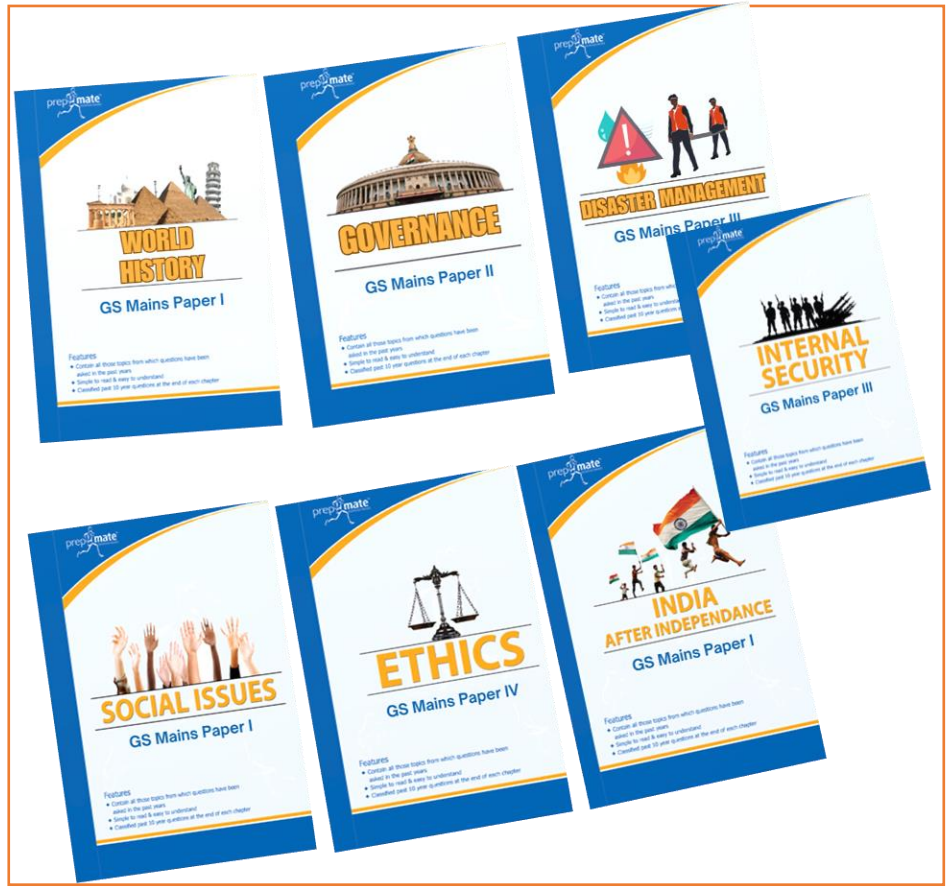

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