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1. What are the rules on contesting seats? How many seats can a candidate contest?

Why in News?

When Congress leader Rahul Gandhi announced that he would contest from Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, questions were raised on why he took the decision after the Kerala election was over — he is a contestant from Wayanad too. According to the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951, a candidate is permitted to contest an election from up to two constituencies, but he or she can hold only one seat at a time if elected from both.

Is there a cap?

A sub-section, 33 (7), of the RPA, allowing a candidate to contest from two seats, was introduced through an amendment in 1996, prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

However, Section 70 of the same Act stipulates that a candidate can hold only one seat at a time, regardless of whether he or she has been elected from more than one seat. Thus, if a candidate wins from two seats, a byelection is necessary from the seat he or she vacates.

Moreover, a person has to be a voter in a particular State to contest Assembly polls from there. But to contest in a Lok Sabha election, a person can be registered as a voter in any constituency of the country. If a person is a registered voter in any constituency, he or she can contest from any seat in India, except Assam, Lakshadweep and Sikkim.

What is the minimum age to contest?

The minimum age for a person to contest Lok Sabha and Assembly polls is 25 years, while one can become a member of the Rajya Sabha or the State Legislative Council only at 30 years. There is no minimum educational qualification needed to contest general elections in India. Candidates must be citizens of India, registered in some constituency of the country as a valid voter and must not have been convicted of any offence punishable by more than two years.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. How is India streamlining the pharma sector?

Why in News?

India's drug regulator, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), has withdrawn powers delegated to State licensing authorities to issue NOCs (no objection certificates) for manufacture of unapproved, banned or new drugs for export purposes. This latest announcement covering drugs for export comes at a time when India has been under

scrutiny for allegations of supplying substandard drugs causing health concerns in several countries. The CDSCO is now the sole authority for issuing manufacturing licences for drugs meant for export.



What is India's role in the pharma market?

India ranks third worldwide as a producer of drugs and pharmaceuticals by volume, exporting to around 200 countries/territories. The Indian pharmaceutical industry supplies 62% of the global demand for vaccines and is a leading supplier of DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus), BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin, used primarily against tuberculosis), and measles vaccines. At least 70% of WHO's vaccines (as per the essential immunisation schedule) are sourced from India, the Centre had noted in a submission in Parliament.

What will be the impact?

India is a key player in the international generic medicine market and any change in policy has a direct impact on manufacturers and importers, say industry insiders. The centralising of the licensing authority is significant, they point out, because according to a study conducted by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, India needs to get ready to take advantage of drug sales worth \$251 billion going off-patent this coming decade.

The study notes: In the years between 2022 and 2030, the pharmaceutical sector in India will undergo landmark changes as several drugs are expected to go off-patent and provide an opportunity for the entry of generic products. Expiry of patents is very promising for the Indian generic drug market as it is expected to expand and grow further with inclusion of these new drugs.

What about the quality of manufacturing?

The Indian pharmaceutical industry has an estimated 10,500 companies, with drug exports having more than doubled in the past decade. But the industry has faced a series of scandals of late, including a World Health Organization investigation into four contaminated cough syrups that caused acute kidney injuries and were linked to the deaths of 66 children in the Republic of the Gambia last year.

In what seems like an effort to keep a strict watch, the latest order by CDSCO states that pharmaceutical companies will have to get their NOCs from the zonal offices of CDSCO online before applying for manufacturing licences from their respective State/UT drug regulators.

In 2018, the CDSCO had permitted State and UTs' drug licensing authorities to grant permissions to export some specific drugs. As per the new order, local regulators will have to hand over the details of all the approvals they have given from August 2018 to May 2024 to CDSCO.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

3. What FLiRT, a new set of Covid-19 variant detected in the US

Introduction

For most of this year, the JN.1 variant of the coronavirus accounted for an overwhelming majority of COVID-19 cases. But now an offshoot variant called KP.2 is taking off. The variant, which made up just 1% of cases in the United States in mid-March, now makes up more than one-quarter.

KP.2 belongs to a subset of COVID variants that scientists have cheekily nicknamed "FLiRT," drawn from the letters in the names of their mutations. They are descendants of JN.1, and KP.2 is "very, very close" to JN.1.

While cases currently don't appear to be on the rise, researchers and physicians are closely watching whether the variant will drive a summer surge.



The Current Spread of COVID

Experts said it would take several weeks to see whether KP.2 might lead to a rise in COVID cases and noted that we have only a limited understanding of how the virus is spreading. Since the public health emergency ended, there is less robust data available on cases, and doctors said fewer people were using COVID tests.

The Latest on Symptoms and Long COVID

Doctors said the symptoms of both KP.2 and JN.1 — which now makes up around 16% of cases — are most likely similar to those seen with other variants. These include sore throat, runny nose, coughing, head and body aches, fever, congestion, fatigue and, in severe cases, shortness of breath.

Fewer people lose their sense of taste and smell now than did at the start of the pandemic, but some people will still experience those symptoms.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express