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Oxfam Report on Inequality

The international rights group, **Oxfam** released its annual study before the start of the five-day World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Findings

GLOBAL

- Only **26 people on the earth** now own the same amount of resources as the 3.8 billion people. This highlights the **intensity** of the **concentration of wealth**.
- The governments are exacerbating inequality by **underfunding** public services, such as healthcare and education, on the one hand, while **under-taxing corporations and the wealthy**, and failing to clamp down on tax avoidance on the other.
 - When public services are neglected, **poor women and girls suffer most**.
E.g: Girls are pulled out of school first when the money is not available to pay fees, and women clock up hours of unpaid work looking after sick relatives when healthcare systems fail.
 - Also, cutting taxes on wealth **predominantly benefits men** who own 50% more wealth than women globally, and control over 86% of corporations.
- **Unpaid work done by women** across the globe amounts to a **staggering \$10 trillion a year**, which is 43 times the annual turnover of the world's biggest company Apple.

INDIA

- India's **top 10% of population holds 77.4%** of the total national wealth. The top 1% hold 51.53% of the national wealth, while the remaining 99% make do with almost 48%.
 - The **top 1% of India's wealthiest** got **richer by 39%** compared to 3% growth in the incomes of the bottom 50%.
 - The **poorest 10% (13.6 crores)** Indians have been living under the burden of

debt since 2004.

- **Women and girls are hardest hit** by rising economic inequality, including in India.
- In India, the **unpaid work done** by women looking after their homes and children is **worth 3.1% of the country's GDP**.
- The Oxfam study also referred to **India's poor 108th ranking on the WEF's Global Gender Gap Index of 2018**, stating that households that rely primarily on female earners tend to be poorer **because of gender pay gap**.
- The various intersections of caste, class, religion, age and sexual orientation have further implications on women inequality as a process. Although, India has many laws that deal with violence against women, but their implementation remains a challenge, mostly because of a **deeply patriarchal society**.
- Women's ability to undertake paid work is not merely determined by **economic considerations but also by social norms**. E.g.:

It is understood that a woman's primary role is to **take care of the house** and her family and any income generating work is secondary to this role.

Recommendations

All governments should set concrete, timebound targets and action plans to reduce inequality as part of their commitments under **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-10: Reduce Inequalities)**. These plans should include action in the following three areas:

- **Universal free** health care, education, pensions, child benefits and other public services that also work for women and girls should be delivered.
- **Freeing up of women's time** should be a key objective of government spending. Investment must be made in public services including water, electricity and childcare that reduces the time needed to do this unpaid work.
- **End the under-taxation** of rich individuals and corporations. Tax avoidance and evasion by corporates and the super-rich should be eliminated. Tax system should be redesigned to make it fair, with developing countries having an equal seat at the table.

Shortcomings

Oxfam determines global inequality on the basis of one's net wealth—assets minus liabilities and excludes income altogether, **ignoring** purchasing power parity, standard of living, pension funds and future claims of investments which are **major parameters for measuring inequality**.

E.g.: A large section of Indian population **invest in the education and career building** of their children. That may be a liability today but is also an investment for tomorrow. Liabilities with income is not the same as liabilities without income.

Himalayan Glaciers Impacted by Climate Change

Recently, a study has concluded that the **Chaturangi Glacier**, a tributary of Gangotri glaciers, is receding.

- The study was done by scientists from GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development and the Centre for Earth Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) using the **satellite data from 1989 to 2016** and **kinematic GPS**.
- The retreating glacier is an example of the impact of climate change.

Kinematic GPS

Kinematic Global Positioning System (GPS) is a satellite navigation technique used to enhance the precision of data from satellite-based positioning systems.

Findings of the Study

- Chaturangi glacier is **retreating at a “considerable rate”** and may vanish in the future.
- The Chaturangi glacier **was connected with the Gangotri glacier till 1989 but is now detached** and retreating at the rate of about 22.84 m/year.
- The variability in retreating rate is not only controlled by climate change but is also governed by glacier size, type, topographic setting and debris cover.
- The retreating rate of the Chaturangi glacier is higher than the Gangotri glacier because of its smaller size and fast response time to climatic variability.

Impact of Glacier Retreat

- **The flow of Ganga:** Since Ganga originates from Gangotri glacier, which is fed by its tributary glaciers, the rapid retreat of glaciers like Chaturangi and Raktavaran will **impact flow and water level in the Ganga**.
- **Impact on Human Life:** NASA’s Land Use Land Cover Change programme has predicted that **glacial melt will impact water supplies in the Himalayan region**.
There will also be an **impact on agriculture, including soil loss due to soil erosion, landslides, and floods**.
- **Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF):** Glacial lakes may also form due to the accumulation of melted ice, which may result in Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF).

About Gangotri Glacier

- Gangotri Glacier is situated in the **Uttarkashi District of Uttarakhand**.

- The Gangotri glacier originates at the **northern slope of Chaukhamba range of peaks in Garhwal Himalayas**. It is about 30 km long and 0.5 to 2.5 km wide.
 - Gangotri is not a single valley glacier, but a combination of several other glaciers. This glacier comprises three main tributaries, namely **Raktavaran (15.90 km), Chaturangi (22.45 km) and Kirti (11.05 km) and more than 18 other tributary glaciers**.
 - The **Bhagirathi**, one of the **main tributaries of the Ganga**, originates from the gangotri glacier. The Ganges has five headstreams—**the Bhagirathi, the Alaknanda, the Mandakini, the Dhauliganga, and the Pindar**—all rise in the mountainous region of northern Uttarakhand.
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Yellow Fever Vaccine

Yellow Fever Vaccine

- Recently a controversy over the safety of yellow fever vaccine has come up.
- Yellow fever, a fatal disease, **spreads through mosquitoes**. It is often associated with jaundice, hence the name yellow.
- It is usually compulsory to get vaccinated before traveling to any of the yellow fever-endemic countries in parts of Africa, and Central and South America.
- Yellow fever vaccine which is known as **17D** and according to the World Health Organization (WHO) also it is safe and affordable. However, there are **reports of multisystem organ failure following vaccination**.
- Due to such reports, **vaccine hesitancy** is a growing problem the world over.

Working of a Vaccine

- Many vaccines introduce a pathogen inside the body. For example, the yellow fever vaccine is a live, weakened yellow fever virus. Because it is live, the body responds to it the same way as in a full-blown infection.
- This ensures that the body knows the vulnerabilities of that virus for the rest of the person's life.
- Thus, whenever an invasion happens, blood cells that retain the memory of that virus immediately work towards defeating the nascent invasion much before it can go on to become a full-blown infection.

Vaccine Hesitancy in India

- Vaccine hesitancy refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite the availability of vaccination services.
- Recently **Delhi High Court underlined the importance of parental consent** in vaccines given to children in school.

- The **Health Ministry** has **commissioned a study on vaccine hesitancy**, to be conducted by its Immunisation Technical Support Unit in association with GAVI, an international organization supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
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Niti Aayog-led Committee to Monitor Pricing of Drugs

The Union government has formed **Standing Committee on Affordable Medicines and Health Products (SCAMHP) under NITI Aayog**.

- The objective of the committee is to **recommend medicines for price control**. Thus, **diluting the central role** of the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority

(NPPA) in setting drug prices.

- SCAMHP will be a **recommending body** to NPPA regarding prices of drugs and health products.
- At present, the health ministry prepares the list of drugs eligible for price regulation. The department of pharmaceuticals (DoP) then incorporates National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) into Schedule 1 of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO). Following this, NPPA fixes the prices of drugs in this schedule.
- The committee may take a matter related to pricing for examination, **suo motu** or on the **recommendations of Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), NPPA or the department of health and family welfare**.
- The new committee can also exercise powers **under Para 19 of Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO)**:
 - NPPA exercises **Para 19 powers in public interest**.
 - In 2013, the government had delegated these powers to NPPA, which it can exercise for setting the price cap of scheduled and non-scheduled drugs.
 - NPPA used **para 19 powers in 2017 to cap prices** of cardiac drugs, stents, and knee implants.

Concerns

- The direct implication is that the new committee has **broad discretionary powers** to

intervene in any aspect including related to the functions of the NPPA which could be **used to dilute the pricing regime.**

- Earlier NPPA was taking strict action against those companies found to be overcharging. This will **weaken the functions of NPPA** as an enforcement body.
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Important Facts for Prelims (22nd January 2019)

Swine Flu in Delhi

- Recently fresh cases of swine flu have emerged in Delhi with symptoms being very **similar to normal influenza.**
- Swine flu caused by the “swine flu virus”, the H1N1.
- Swine Flu is an infection of the respiratory tract characterized by the usual symptoms of flu — cough, nasal secretions, fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, and headache.
- It is called swine flu because it was known in the past to occur in people who had been in the vicinity of pigs.
- The virus is transmitted by short-distance airborne transmission, particularly in crowded enclosed spaces. Hand contamination and direct contact are other possible sources of transmission.

Zoonotic Influenzas

- Humans can be infected with avian, swine and other zoonotic influenza viruses, such as avian influenza (or Bird Flu) virus subtypes A(H5N1), A(H7N9), and A(H9N2) and swine influenza virus subtypes A(H1N1), A(H1N2) and A(H3N2).
- Viruses are classified into subtypes according to the combinations of different virus surface proteins hemagglutinin (HA) and neuraminidase (NA). So far there are 18 different hemagglutinin subtypes and 11 different neuraminidase subtypes.

World Economic Outlook Report

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has released an update of its biennial **World Economic Outlook Report 2018.**
- India’s GDP is forecasted to expand 7.5% in FY20 and 7.7% in FY21. China’s growth is seen at 6.2% in both years.
- The FY20 forecast has been raised by 0.1percentage point from the projected outlook in October 2018.
- According to the report, India’s economy will pick up growth in 2019, benefiting from lower oil prices and a slower pace of monetary tightening than previously expected, as inflationary pressures ease.
- The global economy is projected to grow by 3.5% in 2019 and 3.6% in 2020.

