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Maternal Mortality Rate: India

- Recently, the Office of the Registrar General's Sample Registration System (SRS) has issued a special bulletin on Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India in the year 2017-19.
- According to the World Health Organisation, maternal death is defined as the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy from any cause related to pregnancy or its management.
- Maternal mortality rate (MMR) is the death of mothers per one lakh live births.

Registrar General of India:

- It works under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It also provides estimates of fertility and mortality rates using the Sample Registration System (SRS) in addition to computing the population and implementing the registration of deaths and births in the country.
- The SRS is the largest demographic sample survey in the country in which other indicators provide a direct estimate of maternal mortality through a nationally representative sample.
- Verbal Autopsy-VA devices are administered for deaths recorded under SRS on a regular basis, to ascertain the mortality rate due to a specific cause in the country.

India's position regarding MMR?

- India's maternal mortality rate has declined by 10 points. It has come down from 113 in 2016-18 to 103 (8.8% decline) in 2017-18.

- Progressive reduction in MMR in the country was observed in the year 2014-2016 to 130 in the year 2015-17, 122 in the year 2016-18 and 103 in the year 2017-19.
- India was close to achieving the National Health Policy (NHP) target of 100/million live births by 2020 and certainly on track to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals of 70/million live births by 2030.
- Many developed countries have successfully brought down MMR to single digits. Italy, Norway, Poland and Belarus have the minimum MMR of two, while Germany and the UK both have it at seven, Canada has 10 and the US has 19.
- Most of India's neighbouring countries—Nepal (186), Bangladesh (173) and Pakistan (140)—have a higher MMR. However, China and Sri Lanka are in a much better position with 18.3 and 36 MMR respectively.

State-Specific Statistics:

- The number of states achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has now increased from five to seven, these are- Kerala (30), Maharashtra (38), Telangana (56), Tamil Nadu (58), Andhra Pradesh (58), Jharkhand (61) and Gujarat (70).
- Kerala has recorded the lowest MMR which puts Kerala ahead of the national MMR of 103.
- Kerala's maternal mortality rate has declined by 12 points. The previous SRS bulletin (2015-17) had put the state's MMR at 42, which was later adjusted to 43.
- Now there are nine states which have achieved the MMR target set by the National Health Policy, which includes the above seven and Karnataka (83) and Haryana (96).
- Uttarakhand (101), West Bengal (109), Punjab (114), Bihar (130), Odisha (136) and Rajasthan (141) have MMR between 100-150, while Chhattisgarh (160), Madhya Pradesh (163), Uttar Pradesh (167) and Assam (205) have MMR above 150.

Some related government initiatives:

- Janani Suraksha Yojana to provide cash assistance for institutional deliveries under National Health Mission.
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) 9th of every month has been fixed as a fixed date for assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care to pregnant women.
- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, nutrition campaign and target guidelines.

One Nation, One Election

- Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra has recently said that 'Election Commission' is ready to hold simultaneous or 'one nation, one election'.
- Earlier this year, on National Voters' Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his address 'One Nation, One Voter'/'Common Electoral Roll' and 'One Nation, One Election', (One Election), and said that the continuous cycle of election results affects development works.

About 'One Nation, One Election':

- One Nation-One Election/'One Nation One Election' means the holding of elections to the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies once in every five years and simultaneously.

Challenges arising from having frequent elections:

- Huge expenditure.
- Disruption of policies as a result of the Model Code of Conduct at the time of elections.
- Impact on delivery of essential services.
- Additional load on man-force to be deployed during elections.
- Increasing pressure on political parties, especially smaller ones, as they are getting expensive day by day.

Benefits of holding simultaneous elections:

- **Governance and Conformity:** The ruling party will be able to focus on law and administration instead of always being in election campaign mode.
- Efficiency in expenditure and administration of funds.
- Continuity in policies and programmes.
- **Governance Capacity:** Reduction in populist measures by governments.
- Reduction in the impact of black money on voters by holding all elections in one go.

Impact on Regional Parties:

- When the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections are held simultaneously, there is always a tendency among the voters to vote to bring the same party to power, both at the Center and in the State.

Changes to be made in the constitution and laws to implement the provision for holding simultaneous elections:

- **Article 83**, which deals with the tenure of the Houses of Parliament, will need to be amended.
- **Article 85** (Article regarding the dissolution of the Lok Sabha by the President)
- **Article 172** (Articles relating to the tenure of the State Legislatures)
- **Article 174** (Articles relating to the dissolution of state legislatures)
- **Article 356** (Articles related to President's rule)

There will be a need to amend the 'Representation of the People Act, 1951' for the stability of the terms of both the Parliament and the Legislative Assemblies. **It should include the following important elements:**

- Reorganization of the powers and functions of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to facilitate the necessary procedures for holding simultaneous elections.
- The definition of 'simultaneous election' can be added in section 2 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

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