



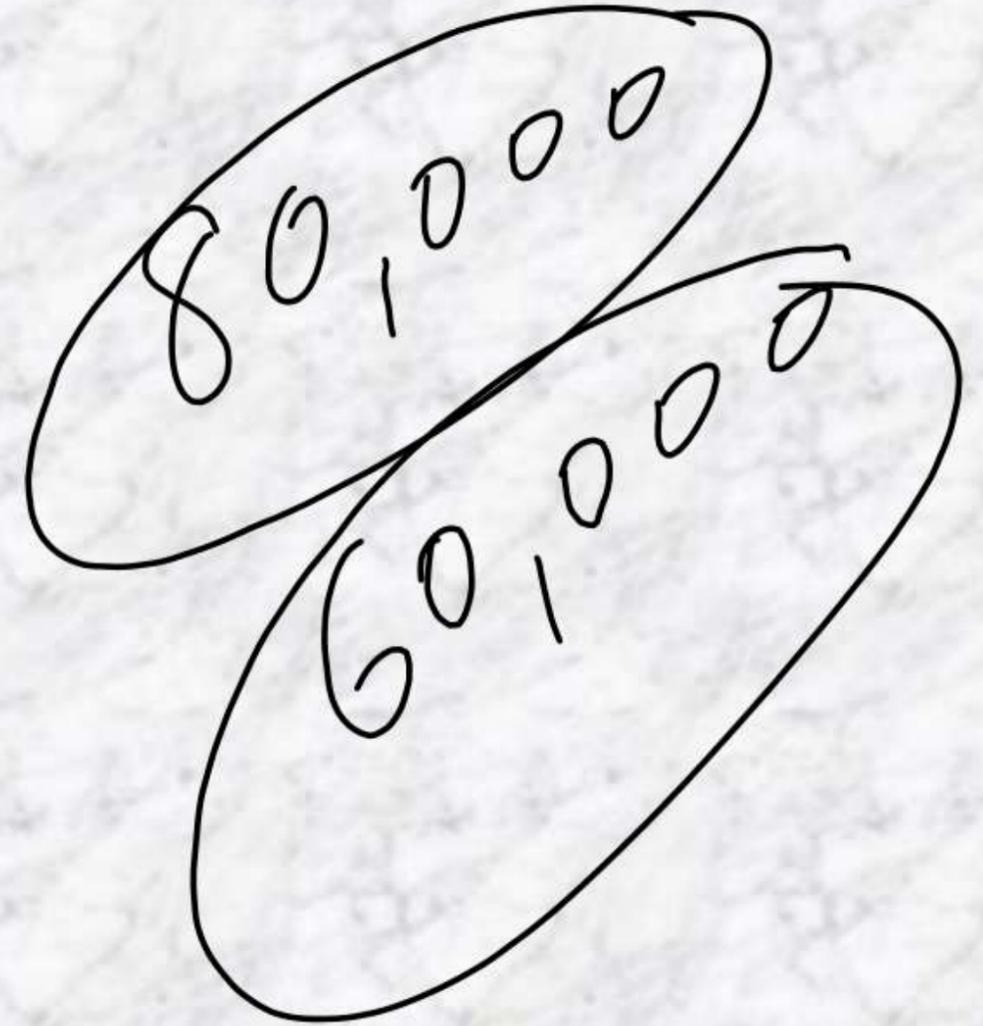
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## ❖ Regional Benches of Supreme Court

- **Context:** Recently, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice informed the Lok Sabha that the **Law Ministry has accepted its recommendation to establish regional benches of the Supreme Court across India.**
- **What did the committee say?**
- The Committee observed that the Delhi-centric Supreme Court creates a significant hurdle for litigants coming from faraway areas of the country.

- **The Committee stated that the demand for establishing regional benches of the Supreme Court is based on the fundamental right of access to justice.**
- **As per Article 130 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court will sit in Delhi or in such other place or places as the Chief Justice of India, with the approval of the President, may appoint.**
- **The Committee recommended the establishment of regional benches of the Supreme Court.**



- **It noted that Article 130 may be invoked to establish regional benches at four or five locations.**
- **It suggested that the regional benches may decide appellate matters, while Constitutional matters may be dealt at Delhi.**

## ➤ **Why it is needed?**

- **It becomes practically impossible for people living in States far away from Delhi to agitate their cause. It is easy to say that the presence of a litigant is not required in appellate forums but the reality is that every litigant wishes to visit his lawyer and witness court proceedings involving his case.**
- **A little more than 80,000 cases are currently pending adjudication out of which 60,000 cases are civil. The establishment of regional benches will increase the number of judges**

- as well as lawyers resulting in a much-needed boost to our judicial system
- Democratization of the Bar: Establishment of regional branches of Supreme court will provide options for
- **Why it is being opposed?**
- It could lead to more divergent views and adversely affect our justice delivery system
- There is a possibility of numerous frivolous petitions being filed with easier access to justice as in the present times most of the cases in Supreme Court are coming from Delhi High court.

PIL



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## Way forward

(HC)

→ Use of technology.

→ division bench / Appellate benches.

→ Increasing Infra and personnel.

## ❖ Surrogacy Rules modified

- The Union government on February 21 modified the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022, to permit married couples to use donor eggs or donor sperm for surrogacy — a move that provided a big relief to those with medical complications. This revoked a previous amendment made in March 2023 that banned the use of such donor gametes



## ➤ **New Rules:**

- **On March 14, 2023, Form 2 (Consent of the Surrogate Mother and Agreement for Surrogacy) of the Surrogacy Rules was amended to stipulate that donor eggs could not be used for gestational surrogacy of an intending couple.**
- **This has now been amended by a notification of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare allowing married couples to use a donor gamete on the condition that a District Magistrate Board certifies that either the husband or the wife suffers from**

- **a medical condition.**
- **However, the notification outlines that the child to be born through surrogacy must have at least one gamete from the intending parents.**
- **This implies that a married couple where both partners are unable to use their gametes due to an existing medical condition cannot opt for surrogacy.**
- **The change is however not applicable to widowed or divorced women.**

- The modified rules state — “Single woman (widow or divorcee) undergoing surrogacy must use self-eggs and donor sperms to avail surrogacy procedure
- **Surrogacy Act Major Provisions**
- The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 prohibits commercial surrogacy.
- Only altruistic arrangements where women acting as surrogates do not receive any monetary remuneration or compensation are allowed.
- Further, it allows only gestational surrogacy where Assisted Reproductive Technologies

→ Eligibility of Couple

→ Eligibility of Surrogate mother

→ Exclusion

- (ARTs) such as In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) are used to induce the surrogate pregnancy.
- Only married couples and ever-married single women (widowed or divorced) can seek a surrogacy.
- The intending parents additionally have to produce a “certificate of essentiality” that attests to medical indications that justify use of gestational surrogacy.
- **Some Examples of Misuse of Surrogacy:**
- In 2008 a Japanese couple began the process with a surrogate mother in Gujarat,

- but before the child was born they split with both of them refusing to take the child.
- In 2012, an Australian couple commissioned a surrogate mother, and arbitrarily chose one of the twins that were born.
- **Who Can opt for Surrogacy?**
- As per the Surrogacy Act, a married couple can opt for surrogacy only on medical grounds.
- The law defines a couple as a married Indian “man and woman” and also prescribes an

- **age-criteria with the woman being in the age group of 23 to 50 years and the man between 26 to 55 years.**
- **Additionally, the couple should not have a child of their own.**
- **Though the law allows single women (a widow or divorcee) to resort to surrogacy, she should either be a widow or a divorcee, between the age of 35 to 45 years. Single men are however, not eligible.**

## ➤ **Who can become a surrogate mother?**

➤ **Only a close relative of the couple can be a surrogate mother, one who is able to provide a medical fitness certificate. She should have been married, with a child of her own, and must be between 25 and 35 years, but can be a surrogate mother only once.**

## ➤ **Challenges:**

➤ **It does not allow single women, or men, or gay couples to go in for surrogacy.**

- **A couple, according to the 2021 Act, is identified as a married 'Indian man and woman' of ages above 21 and 18, respectively, leaving behind any man and woman in a live-in relationship intending to avail these services. The Act promotes the institution of marriage by limiting the meaning of couple to the definition in Section 2(h).**
- **The Act also results in the exclusion of couples who might be unfit medically or dealing with chronic diseases that can result in the unborn baby being more prone to such diseases.**

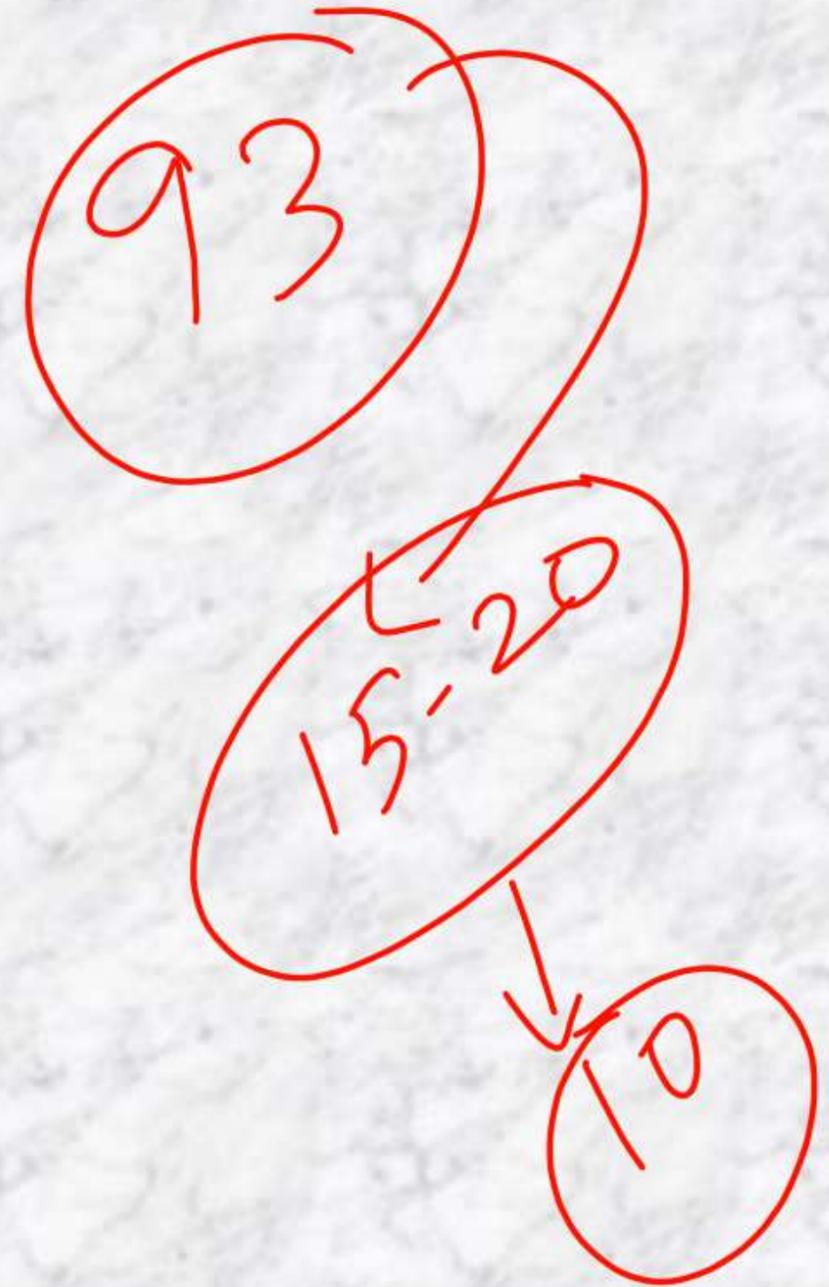
- **The Act further stresses that a couple must constitute a man and a woman, limiting the right of availing surrogacy services only to a heterosexual married couple.**
- **The banning of commercial surrogacy moves from the rights-based approach to a needs-based approach, thus removing the women's autonomy to make their own reproductive decisions and right to parenthood.**

- **Having a relative as a surrogate mother may lead to emotional complications. Altruistic surrogacy also limits the option of the intending couple in choosing a surrogate mother as very limited relatives**

## ❖ **Rare Diseases in India**

- **According to the World Health Organization, rare diseases afflict 1 or less per 1,000 population.**
- **Barely 5% of the over 7,000 known diseases worldwide are treatable.**
- **Most patients typically receive only basic treatment that alleviates symptoms.**
- **Some require exorbitantly priced antidotes and supportive medication throughout their lives, which they can't afford.**
- **Suffering and death are the fate of many who are victims of rare diseases**

- **Rare diseases in India**
- India accounts for **one-third of the global rare disease incidence**, with over 450 identified diseases.
- These range from widely known ones such as Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Gaucher's disease to lesser-known ones such as Mucopolysaccharidosis type 1 and Whipple's disease.
- Various estimates suggest that about 8 crore-10 crore Indians suffer from one rare disease or another, and among them, over 75% are children.





- **Yet these diseases are largely overlooked. Resource constraints apart, India languishes near the bottom on awareness, diagnosis, and drug development for rare diseases.**
- **The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare formulated a national policy to treat rare diseases in 2017 but withdrew it in 2018 owing to “implementation challenges” and confusion regarding disease coverage, patient eligibility, and cost-sharing.**
- **A revised policy, the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD), was announced in 2021, but problems persist.**

- We still don't define 'rare diseases', because according to the government, there is a lack of sufficient data.
- **Challenges with rare diseases:**
- For rare disease patients, it takes an average of seven years for their conditions to be diagnosed (if at all it is being diagnosed).
- The physicians are generally unaware of how to interpret the signs and symptoms
- Less than 50% of the 450-odd rare diseases identified in India are treatable.

- **The treatments approved by the Drugs Controller General of India are available for just about 20 rare diseases and can be availed only from Centres of Excellence (CoEs) (the number of which is just 12).**
- **The Budget's allocation for rare diseases, although increasing over the years, remains low at ₹93 crore for 2023-2024, with previous years having seen reductions of up to 75% from the Budget Estimate stage to the Revised Estimates and an even worse reduction of 90% in actual expenditure.**

## ➤ **Suggestions:**

- **The Central government can frame a standard definition of rare diseases**
- **It can increase budgetary outlays, dedicate funding for drug development and therapy**
- **It can increase the number of CoEs while also ensuring better coordination and responsible utilisation of funds.**
- **The state governments must introduce social assistance programmes and develop satellite centres under the CoEs.**

- **Public and private companies could be co-opted for funding; CSR initiatives and partnerships can be leveraged to meet shortfalls**
- **Healthcare professionals must be trained to improve their diagnostic accuracy.**

## ❖ Kala Azar ✓

- **Context:** India has achieved the target of reporting less than one case of Kala Azar per 10,000 population across all blocks in 2023.
- Data from the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme showed that there were 595 cases and four deaths of Kala Azar reported nationwide last year compared to 891 cases and three deaths in 2022.
- Kala Azar (or visceral leishmaniasis) is a parasitic infection transmitted by sandflies.

①  
10000  
2024  
2025

- **It causes fever, weight loss, spleen and liver enlargement. Left untreated, it can be fatal in 95% of cases.**
- **In October 2023, Bangladesh became the first country in the world to be officially validated by the WHO for eliminating Kala Azar as a public health problem.**
- **India's initial target year for Kala Azar elimination was 2010, which was later extended to 2015, 2017, and then 2020.**
- **Elimination for Kala Azar is defined as no block in the country reporting more than one case per 10,000 people**

- **India has to keep case count below 1 per 10,000 population in all blocks for two more years for getting the tag of “Kala Azar Elimination”**

## ❖ China's panda diplomacy

- **Context:** Giant pandas are native to central China, particularly the Yangtze River basin. The Chinese government gifts or loans these endemic pandas to other countries as a symbol of friendship or soft diplomacy, hence leading to the phrase "panda diplomacy".
- **Red Panda:** ✓
- The red panda is a small arboreal mammal found in the forests of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and the northern mountains of Myanmar and southern China.

2200 - 4800 m

- **Habitat:** It thrives best at 2,200-4,800m in mixed deciduous and conifer forests with dense understories of bamboo, though red panda evidences have also been found at 1800m.
- In India, this elusive species is found in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal.
- It is the state animal of Sikkim.
  - IUCN- Endangered
  - WPA- Schedule I/IV
  - CITES- Appendix I



## ❖ Places in News: Katchatheevu Islands

- **Context:** On February 17, fishermen associations in Ramanathapuram district announced that they were boycotting the annual two-day festival, scheduled for February 23 and 24, at the St. Anthony's Church in the uninhabited Katchatheevu islet.
- Katchatheevu (meaning 'barren island' in Tamil) is a 285-acre uninhabited isle that was caused by a 14th-century volcanic eruption.

- **Katchatheevu islet, a part of Sri Lanka and located about 14 nautical miles from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu,**
- **The island was ceded by the Indian administration under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to Sri Lanka in 1974 in an act of bilateral largesse.**
- **Since the outbreak of the Lankan civil war, in 1983, the island became the crownless battleground for combats between Indian Tamil fishers and a Sinhala-dominated Lankan navy.**





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