

NATIONAL HEALTH ACCOUNTS ESTIMATES 2018-19

Context

According to the National Health Accounts Estimates 2018-19, government spending as a percentage of total health expenditure increased by more than 11 percentage points over the previous five years, from 23.2% in 2013-14 to 34.5% in 2018-19.

The National Health Accounts (NHA) Estimates describe the country's total expenditure on healthcare — whether by the government, the private sector, individuals, or NGOs — and the flow of these funds. It answers questions such as what are the sources of healthcare spending, who manages this spending, who provides healthcare services, and which services are utilised.

Major findings of the report

One of the most important findings of the 2018-19 report is that government spending as a proportion of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went down to 1.28% from 1.35% in the previous year's (2017-18) report.

The total health spending — which includes spending by both government and non-government agents — declined from 3.9% of the GDP to 3.2% in the five years up to 2018-19.

More importantly though, the 2018-19 report shows that the massive fall in out-of-pocket expenditure by patients at the point of care recorded in the previous report has been sustained.

Out-of-pocket expenditure

People paying for healthcare expenses out-of-pocket made up for 48.2% of the total health expenses in the year 2018-19, down from 48.8% in the previous year (2017-18). The out-of-pocket expense has decreased substantially from the 62.6% recorded in 2014-15.

In 2017, India was in 66th position out of 189 countries, with \$100.05 per capita out-of-pocket spending, according to data from the Global Health Expenditure Database (annexure in the report).

Out-of-pocket expenditure was the highest in the developed countries, with the United States ranking 185 (\$1151.94), and the United Kingdom at 167 (\$755.72). At the top — No. 189 — was Switzerland, with \$2,109.74.

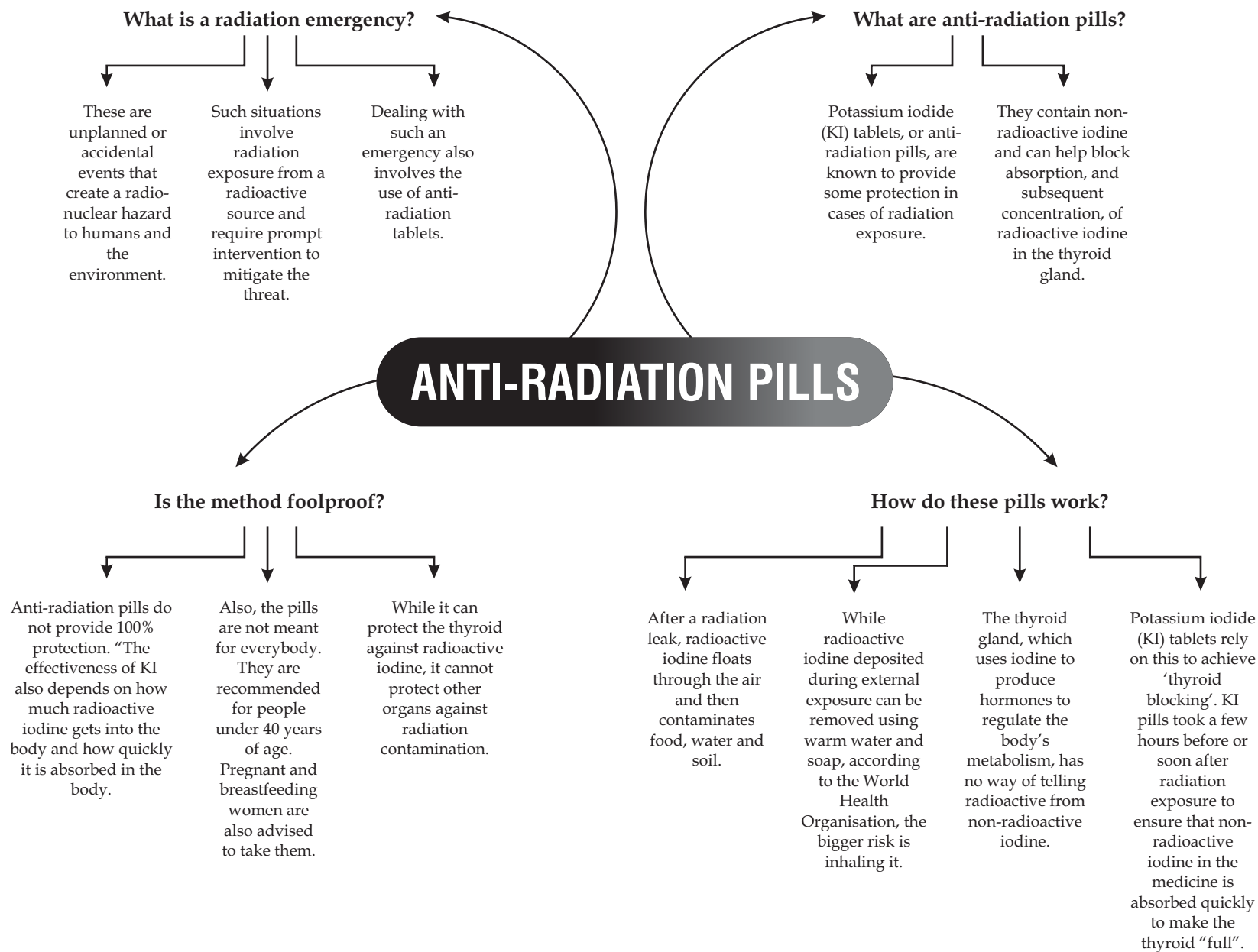
Out-of-pocket expenditure

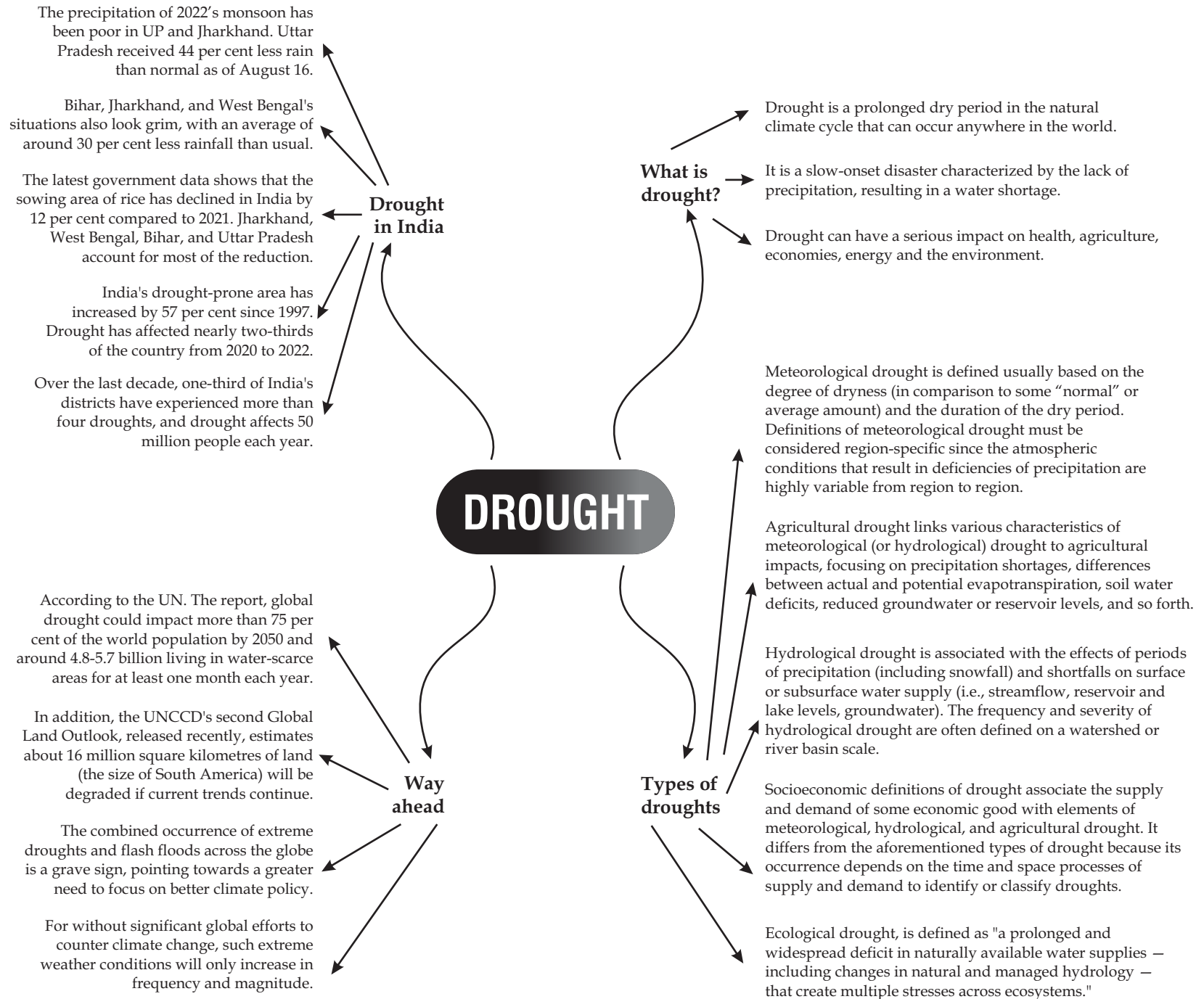
The current health expenditure — not accounting for any expenses that can be utilised over a few years — stood at Rs 5.4 lakh crore, which was 90.6% of the total health expenditure.

The Centre's share in the current health expenditure stood at 11.71%, state governments accounted for 19.63%, local bodies 1.01%, and households (including insurance contributions) 60.11% of the current health expenditure. The rest was accounted for by corporates (as insurance contributions), NGOs, and external or donor funding.

The total government health expenditure, which is spending by any government body for any purpose, for the year stood at Rs 2.42 lakh crore and accounted for 40.6% of the total spending on healthcare.

The government's share in the total expenditure has increased by over 11 percentage points in five years, from 29% recorded in 2014-15.





As many blended food and cosmetic products are sold on the market, the key constituents need to be mentioned on the product packaging. It is common for consumers to assume that brands' claims are accurate, but such claims are usually misleading.

Additionally, the front side of the package must contain the percentage of the composition of the unique selling proposition (USP). As the name suggests, a USP also known as a unique selling point, is a marketing strategy designed to inform customers about the superiority of one's own brand or product.

The Department of Consumer Affairs, Legal Metrology Division has suggested that at least two prime components should be declared on the package's front side along with the brand name. Currently, manufacturers list the ingredients and nutritional information only on the back of the packaging.

The proposed Section 6(1)(ba) states that when a commodity contains more than one constituent, the front side of the package must include a declaration of two or more of the commodities' prime constituents along with the brand name. This declaration must also include the percentage/quantity of the USPs of the product in the same font size as the declaration of the USPs. However, mechanical or electrical commodities are excluded from this sub-rule.

Moreover, public comments were solicited from all stakeholders, including industries, associations, consumers, and voluntary consumer organisations, in order to obtain their viewpoints.

When the new provision of Section 6(1) (ba) is added, consumers will not be misled by the fake claims of manufacturers relating to the content in blended foods and cosmetics.

Proposed amendments

PACKAGED COMMODITIES

Context

The Department of Consumer Affairs, Legal Metrology Division has notified a draft amendment to the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules 2011.

The Department of Consumer Affairs has suggested that at least two prime components should be declared on the package's front side along with the brand name. Currently, manufacturers list the ingredients and nutritional information on the back of the packaging.

Public comments were solicited from all stakeholders, including industries, associations, consumers, and voluntary consumer organisations.

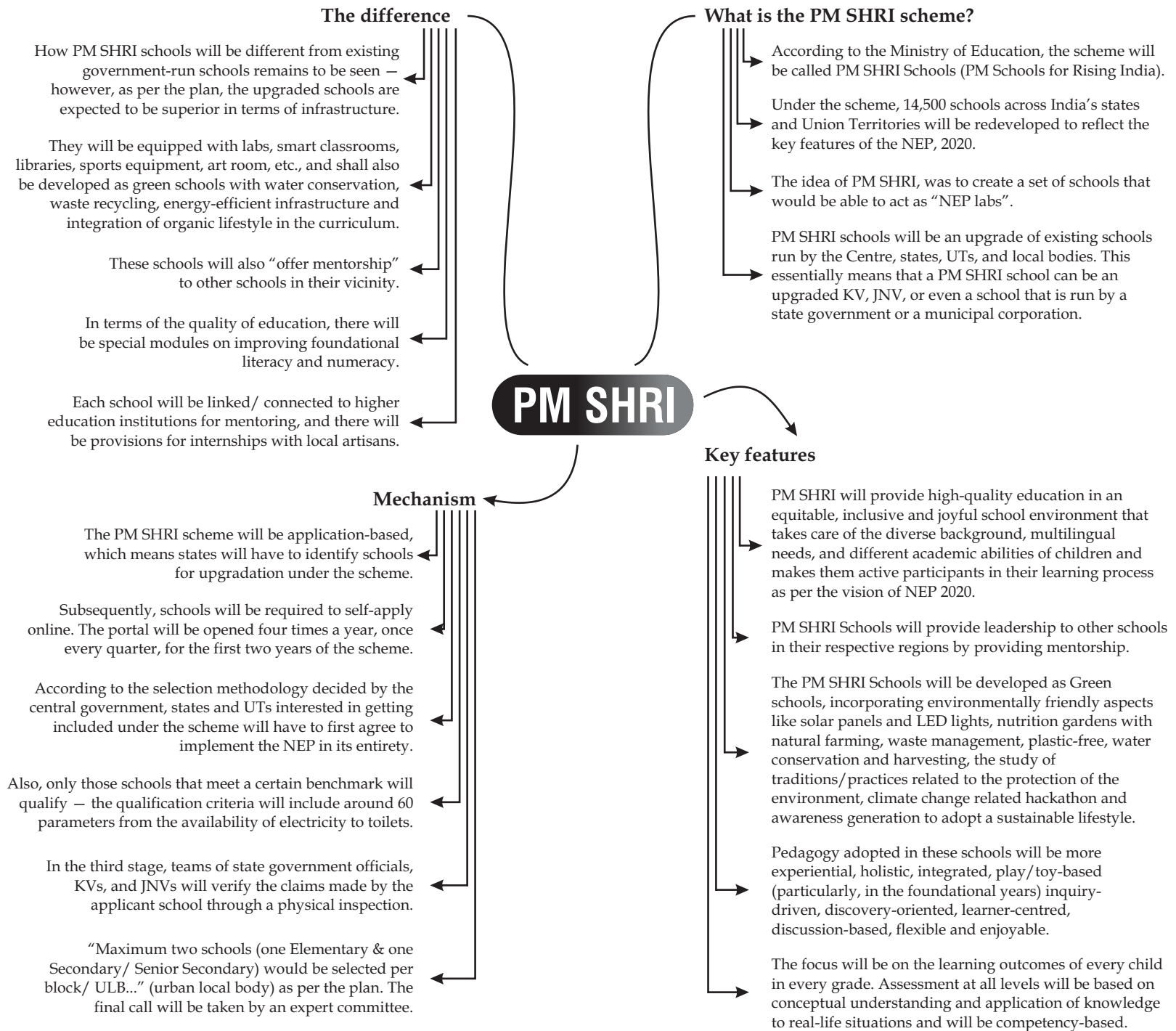
Legal Metrology (packaged Commodities) Rules 2011

It is mandatory under the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011 to ensure several declarations, such as the name and address of the manufacturer/packer/importer, the country of origin, the common or generic name of the commodity, the net quantity, the month and year of manufacture, the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) and consumer care information. As a consumer-oriented policy, all prepackaged commodities should also be inspected.

As stated in Rule 2(h), the "principal display panel", about a package, means the total surface area of a package containing the information required by these rules, namely that all the information should be grouped and given in one place – the pre-printed information could be grouped and given in one place and the online information in another place.

Additionally, Rule 9(1)(a) provides that the declaration on the package must be legible and prominent. The consumers' 'right to be informed' is violated when important declarations are not prominently displayed on the package.

If there is more than one major product, Rule 6(1)(b) states that ".....the name or number of each product shall be mentioned on the package." This sub-rule is, however, not applicable to mechanical or electrical commodities.



Why in news?

The Supreme Court has dismissed a writ petition challenging the Constitutional validity of certain provisions of the Special Marriage Act, 1954 under which couples seek refuge for inter-faith and inter-caste marriages.

The writ petition has called the provisions under the SMA violative of the right to privacy guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution as they require couples to give a notice 30 days before the date of marriage inviting objections from the public.

The petitioner's lawyers said that they were now deliberating on an alternative approach to initiate this litigation such as through public interest litigation involving other victims.

About the Act

A marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 allows people from two different religious backgrounds to come together in the bond of marriage.

The Special Marriage Act, 1954 lays down the procedure for both solemnization and registration of marriage, where either the husband or wife or both are not Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, or Sikhs.

According to this Act, the couples have to serve a notice with the relevant documents to the Marriage Officer 30 days before the intended date of the marriage.

SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT, 1954

Section 5 of the SMA requires couples getting married under it to give notice to the Marriage Officer 30 days before the date of marriage. The writ seeks to strike down provisions that follow in Section 6 to Section 10.

Section 6 requires such a notice to be then entered into the Marriage Notice Book maintained by the Marriage Officer, which can be inspected by "any person desirous of inspecting the same". These notices have to be also affixed at a "conspicuous place" in the office of the Marriage Officer so that anyone can object to the marriage.

Section 7 provides the process for objecting such as if either party has a living spouse, is incapable of giving consent due to "unsoundness of mind" or is suffering from a mental disorder resulting in the person being unfit for marriage or procreation.

What provisions have been challenged?

Registration Process

Both parties are required to be present after the submission of documents for issuance of public notice inviting objections.

One copy of the notice is posted on the notice board of the office and a copy of the notice is sent by registered post to both parties as per the given address.

Registration is done 30 days after the date of notice after deciding any objection that may have been received during that period by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM).

Both parties along with three witnesses are required to be present on the date of registration.

How are the world's oceans regulated as of now?

Some treaties, along with the UNCLOS, regulate the conduct of actors on the high seas.

The UNCLOS led to the establishment of territorial sea boundaries 22 km offshore, deciding the region up to which countries could claim full sovereign territorial rights, as well as the 200 nautical miles EEZ limit. It also created the International Seabed Authority and other conflict-resolution mechanisms.

But a treaty dedicated to protecting ocean health does not exist as of now. Conversely, every country has the right to access open seas, resulting in large-scale drilling and trawling operations for catching fish and other animals for commercial purposes.

Why in news?

Negotiations involving 168 countries, including the European Union, to agree on a UN treaty for protecting oceans failed on August 27.

When the latest round of talks began two weeks ago in New York, it was hoped that an agreement would be arrived at for the conserving marine life at the 'high seas' which lie outside the exclusive jurisdiction of different countries.

UN HIGH SEAS TREATY

What are the risks of countries failing to reach an agreement?

But a treaty dedicated to protecting ocean health does not exist as of now. Conversely, every country has the right to access open seas, resulting in large-scale drilling and trawling operations for catching fish and other animals for commercial purposes.

According to NASA, ninety per cent of global warming is occurring in the ocean.

The effects of ocean warming include sea level rise due to thermal expansion, coral bleaching, accelerated melting of Earth's major ice sheets, intensified hurricanes, and changes in ocean health and biochemistry

According to World Wide Fund, excessive fishing has increased manifold over the years, and a third of species such as sharks and rays are at the risk of extinction

What is the proposed UN High Seas treaty?

Also referred to as the 'Paris Agreement for the Ocean', the treaty to deal with Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction has been under discussion for several years.

The proposed treaty concerns the ocean existing beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones that lie from the coast of a country to about 200 nautical miles or 370 km into the sea, till where it has special rights for exploration. Waters beyond that are known as open seas or high seas.

The treaty was to be negotiated under the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982 which governs the rights of countries regarding marine resources.

As there is no treaty for conserving the health of vast swathes of the earth's oceans, a UN resolution in 2017 decided to rectify this while setting 2022 as the deadline.