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Time: 45 Min

Date: 18-03-2024

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ELECTIONS IN INDIA

In News

- The Election Commission announced a seven-phase Lok Sabha election starting April 19.

About election

- Election is the process by which people choose, by voting, representatives to act on their behalf, to represent them, in a legislative body.

- Elections are held on the basis of universal adult franchise, which means all **Indians of 18 years of age** and above **have the right to vote,** irrespective of their caste, colour, religion, sex or place of birth.

    - Elections enable every adult citizen of the country to participate in the process of government formation.

- **Prevailing Scenario :** Elections are held in India frequently.

    - These include elections to elect members of the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies (Vidhan Sabhas) Legislative Councils (Vidhan Parishad) and of, President and Vice-President of India.

    - Elections are also held for local bodies such as municipalities, municipal corporations and Panchayati Raj.

- **Role of ECI:** Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes in India.

> **Article 324: (1)**
> The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-President held under this Constitution shall be vested in a Commission (referred to in this Constitution as the Election Commission).
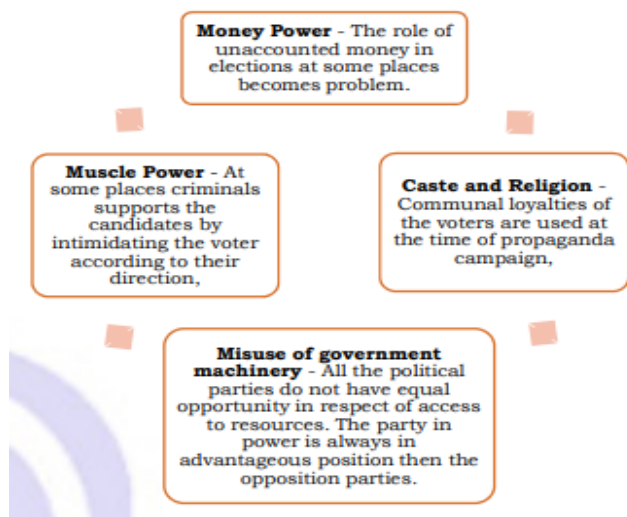
    - It is a three-member body.
        - The main functions of the Election Commission are to delimit the constituencies, recognise the political parties, allot the symbols, and appoint officials to conduct and supervise the elections,

Procedures

- **Notification for Election:** The process of election officially begins when on the recommendation of Election Commission, the President in case of Lok Sabha and the Governor in case of State Assembly issue a notification for the election.

- **Filing of Nomination Structure of Government:** A person who intends to contest an election is required to file the nomination paper in a prescribed form indicating his name, age, postal address and serial number in the electoral rolls.

- **Security Deposit:** Every candidate has to make a security deposit at the time of filing nomination.

- **Scrutiny and Withdrawal :** All nomination papers received by the Returning Officer are scrutinised on the day fixed by the Election Commission.

    - The candidates can also withdraw their nominations.

- **Election Campaign :** Campaigning is the process by which a candidate tries to persuade the voters to vote for him rather than others.

    - During this period, the candidates try to travel through their constituency to influence as many voters as possible to vote in their favour.

- **Model Code of Conduct :** During the campaign period the political parties and the contesting candidates are expected to abide by a model code of conduct evolved by the Election Commission of India on the basis of the consensus among political parties.

    - It comes into force the moment the schedule of the election is announced by the Election Commission.

- **Polling, Counting and Declaration of Result:** In order to conduct polling, large number of polling booths are set up in each constituency.

    - Each booth is placed under the charge of a Presiding Officer with the Polling Officers to help the process.

    - The candidate who secures the highest number of votes in a constituency is declared elected.

Shortcomings of Indian Electoral System -

Money Power - The role of unaccounted money in elections at some places becomes problem.

Muscle Power - At some places criminals supports the candidates by intimidating the voter according to their direction,

Caste and Religion - Communal loyalties of the voters are used at the time of propaganda campaign,

Misuse of government machinery - All the political parties do not have equal opportunity in respect of access to resources. The party in power is always in advantageous position then the opposition parties.

Electoral Reforms

- To restore the confidence of the public in the democratic electoral system, many electoral reforms have been recommended from time to time by the **Tarkunde Committee and Goswami Committee**, under the chairmanship of the then Chief Election Commissioner**, T.N. Seshan**

- **Some reforms are :**voting age has been lowered from 21 years to 18 years.

  - increase in the amount of security deposit.
  - photo identity cards have been introduced.
  - Introduction of Electronic Voting Machine

Conclusion and Way Forward

- There is no doubt that India needs drastic poll reforms but still the fact remains that Indian elections have been largely free and fair and successfully conducted.

- With the acceptance of adult suffrage, freedom to contest elections, and the establishment of an independent Election Commission, India has tried to make its election process free and fair.

- It gives the country the proud distinction of being the largest democracy in the world.

- Still some more steps can be taken like :

  - There should be stricter provisions to control the role of money in electoral politics.
  - Candidates with any criminal case should be barred from contesting elections

- There should be a complete ban on the use of caste and religious appeals in the campaign.
- People themselves have to be more vigilant, more actively involved in political activities.

Source:TH

WITHHOLDING OF PRESIDENTIAL ASSENT OF STATE BILLS

Context

- Kerala government will challenge before the Supreme Court the legality of the President, withholding her assent for the Bills that were passed by the Kerala Legislature.

Background

- The President had withheld assent to Kerala University Laws (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2022, University Law Amendment Bill, 2022, and the University Law Amendment Bill, 2021 from the seven Bills that were referred to her in 2023.

- Kerala argues that the Governor should not have referred the Bills to the President as its subject matters were confined to the State List of the Constitution where the State has powers to legislate.

Governor's power with respect to the Bills

- **Article 200** of the Constitution lays down that when a Bill, passed by a State Legislature, is presented to the Governor for their assent, they have four alternatives:

  - May give assent to the Bill;
  - May withhold assent to the Bill, in which case the Bill fails to become law;
  - May return the Bill (if it is not a Money Bill) for reconsideration of the State Legislature; or However, if the bill is passed again by the state legislature with or without amendments, the governor has to give his assent to the bill, or
  - May reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President.

Reservation of bill for President consideration

- In one case such reservation is obligatory, where the bill passed by the state legislature **endangers the position of the state high court.**

- In addition, the governor can also reserve the bill if it is of the following nature:

- Ultra-vires, that is, against the provisions of the Constitution;
- Opposed to the Directive Principles of State Policy;
- Against the larger interest of the country;
- Of grave national importance;
- Dealing with compulsory acquisition of property under Article the Constitution.

Sarkaria Commission recommendations

- The Commission has submitted that it is only the reservation of Bills for consideration of the President, that too under rare cases of unconstitutionality, that can be implied as a discretionary power of the Governor.
- Save in such exceptional cases, the Governor must discharge his functions under Article 200 **as per the advice of ministers.**
- It further recommended that the President should dispose of such Bills within a maximum period of six months.
- In the event of the President 'withholding assent', the **reasons should be communicated to the State Government** wherever possible.

Way Ahead

- The constitution empowers the governor to reserve a bill for the President's consideration. This is an important 'discretionary power' which is necessary for the governor to make sure that state's laws fall within the framework of the constitution.
- There cannot be a parallel administration within the state by allowing the governor to go against the advice of the council of ministers.
- There is no doubt that these ought to be changed, either by amending the Constitution or through an appropriate Supreme Court verdict, so that misuse of gubernatorial discretion can be kept in check.

Source: TH

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF SNAKEBITE ENVENOMING (NAP-SE)

Context

- The Union Health Ministry launched a National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAP-SE) in India.

Snakebite Envenoming

- The snakebite envenoming (poisoning from snake bites) was classified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a high-priority **neglected tropical disease**.
- An estimated **1.8 – 2.7 million** people worldwide are envenomed annually.

Snake bites in India

- In India, around 90% of snake bites are caused by the '**big four'** among the crawlers - **common krait, Indian cobra, Russell's viper and saw scaled viper.**
- In India, around **50,000 deaths** occur of an estimated **3-4 million** snake bites annually which accounts for half of all snakebite deaths globally.
- India accounts for almost **50%** of global snakebite deaths.

About NAPSE

- **Vision:** "To prevent and control snakebite envenoming in order to halve the numbers of deaths and cases of disability that it causes by 2030"
- **It aims at systematic reduction** of snakebite envenoming risk through sustained availability of anti-snake venom, capacity building, referral mechanism and public education.
- NAPSE provides a broad framework for states to develop their own action plan for management, prevention and control of snakebites through the **'One Health' approach.**

> **One Health Approach**
> - One Health is an approach that recognizes that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.
> - It brings different sectors together to solve the health, productivity, and conservation challenges.
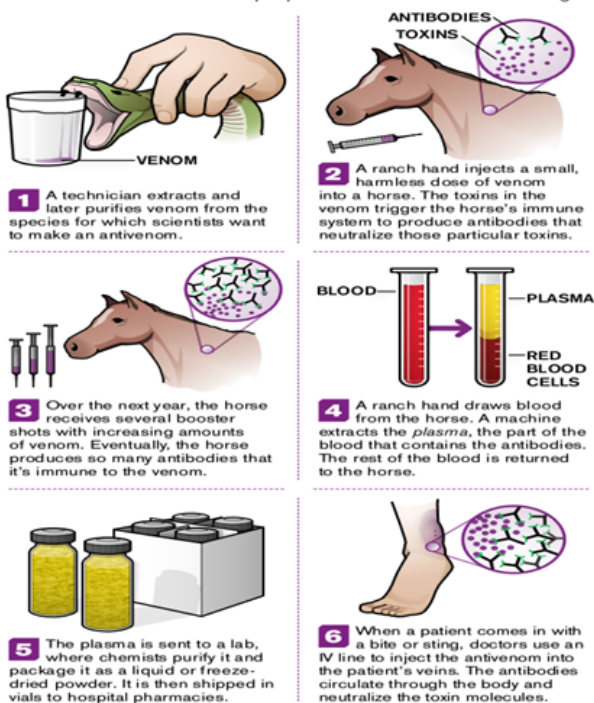
Strategy for developing anti-venom

- **Antivenoms:** Antivenoms are purified antibodies against venoms or venom components. Antivenoms are produced from antibodies made by animals to injected venoms. Antivenom is the only definitive treatment for effective bites by venomous snakes.
  - They are included in the **WHO Essential Medicines List.**

- **Antivenoms making process:** To make life-saving antivenoms, scientists enlist the help of horses that live on specialized ranches.
  - ◆ The animals are injected with a tiny, harmless dose of venom, which causes their immune systems to produce antibody proteins that attack and disable the venom toxins.
  - ◆ Then the antibodies are collected and used to treat people who have been bitten or stung.

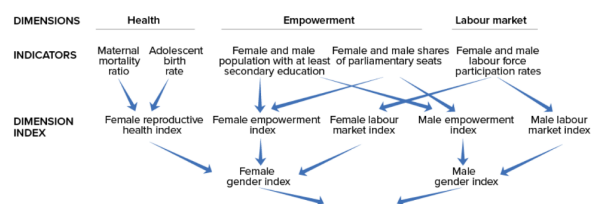**Source: PIB**

GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX 2022

In News

- The Gender Inequality Index 2022 has been released by UNDP in their Human Development Report 2023/2024.

About the index

- GII is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions:
  - ◆ reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.
- A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa.

Dimensions and Indicators

Findings

- Denmark topped the index followed by Norway, Switzerland and Sweden.
- India has registered a significant jump of 14 ranks in Gender Inequality Index 2022.
  - ◆ It ranked 108 out of 193 countries with a score of 0.437 in GII 2022.
  - ◆ In 2022, India saw improvements across all HDI indicators -- life expectancy, education, and gross national income (GNI) per capita and life expectancy rose from 67.2 to 67.7 years, expected years of schooling reached 12.6, mean years of schooling increased to 6.57 and GNI per capita saw an increase from USD 6,542 to USD 6,951.

India's Progressive Improvement

- Over the last 10 years, India's rank in GII has become consistently better, indicating progressive improvement in achieving gender equality in the country.
- India's adolescent birth rate in 2022 was 16.3 (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), an improvement from 17.1 in 2021.
- However, the country still has one of the largest gender gaps in its labour force participation rate — a 47.8% difference between women (28.3 %) and men (76.1 %).

Major initiatives helping India in improvement

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** Provisions for women's social security across various aspects.
- **Mission Shakti:** Self-help mission for empowering women through promotion of Women Self Help Groups (WSHGs) to take up various socio-economic activities.
- **Others:** Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, reservations and legislative policies etc.

Source : AIR

NEWS IN SHORT

CHAUSATH KHAMBA

Context:

- Marked by **marble pillars and exquisite lattice work**, **Chausath Khamba** (**64 pillars)** is a structure near the **Nizamuddin dargah,** the 14th-century shrine built to commemorate **Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.**

About the Chausath Khamba

- **Built in 1623-24 AD**, the structure houses the **tomb of Mirza Aziz Koka,** foster brother of Mughal Emperor Akbar.
  - The structure also finds mention in **Sir Gordon Risley Hearn's book The Seven Cities of Delhi.**
  - "The mausoleum was erected by Mirza Aziz Kokaltash, governor of several provinces under Akbar and is said to be **as old as the shrine itself**."
- As per the official conservation document by **Aga Khan Trust for Culture**:
  - The tomb enclosure is entered through a lofty **arched gateway** and has a large sunken forecourt.
  - The mausoleum is unique on account of it being **built entirely of marble**, with 25 marble domes supporting the flat roof of the structure.
  - The plan for Chausath Khamba could have been **inspired from the wooden garden pavilions from Persia** — such as the **Chihil Sutun**(Forty Columns), and in turn, the Chausath Khamba seems to have **inspired the architectural design for Emperor Shahjahan's Diwan-i-Aam, Hall of Audience.**

- According to author and historian **Sam Dalrymple,** the structure is basically a **piece of Gujarati/ Ahmedabad style architecture in Delhi**. It is the **Urs Mahal, where festivals would be held** during the anniversary of Nizamuddin's death. It shows **how regional architecture travelled across India centuries ago.**

Source: IE

EXERCISE "LAMITIYE-2024

In News

- Indian Army contingent departed for Seychelles to participate in the **Tenth edition of Joint Military Exercise "LAMITIYE-2024"**

About Exercise

- It is a Joint Exercise Between the Indian Army and Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF).
- 'LAMITIYE' meaning **'Friendship'** in the **Creole language** is a **biennial training** event and has been conducted in **Seychelles since 2001**.
- **Features** : The 10 days long Joint Exercise will include Field Training Exercise, combat discussions, lectures & demonstrations, which culminates with two days of Validation Exercise.
- **Objectives** : To enhance interoperability in Sub-conventional Operations in Semi-Urban environments under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter on Peacekeeping Operations.
  - The exercise will also build and promote bilateral military relations in addition to exchanging skills, experiences and good practices between both armies

Source: PIB

ETHANOL 100

In News

- The Ministry of Petroleum has launched 'ETHANOL 100', a groundbreaking automotive fuel, at the IndianOil Retail Outlet.

About

- Ethanol 100 offers a cleaner, greener fuel option with its blend of 92-94% ethanol, 4-5% motor spirit, and 1.5% Co-solvent higher saturated alcohol. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions by around 63% and is ideal for high-performance engines due to its high-octane rating.

Significance

- With the launch of ETHANOL 100 at 183 IndianOil outlets, India is nearing its target of achieving 20% ethanol blending by 2025-26.

- India's Ethanol Blending Program will enhance farmer incomes and rural employment also contribute to environmental sustainability, with significant reductions in CO_2 emissions and foreign exchange savings.

Source: AIR

INDIA'S FIRST INTEGRATED OIL PALM PROCESSING UNIT BY 3F OIL PALM

In News

- India's first integrated oil palm processing unit by 3F Oil Palm started its commercial operations.

About

- Situated in Arunachal Pradesh's Roing, this project aligns with Mission Palm Oil under the National Mission on Edible Oils – Oil Palm (NMEO-OP).

- It is a vital step in India's journey towards self-reliance in edible oils.

National Mission on Edible Oils – Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)

- **About:** Centrally sponsored scheme launched August 2021. Scheme offers financial subsidies to farmers for various activities related to oil palm cultivation.
  - ◆ Targets to increase area of oil palm to 10 lakh hectares from 3.5 lakh ha during 2019-20 by 2025-26.
  - ◆ Under NMEO-OP the cost will be shared as 60:40 between the Central and the State Government for General states and 90:10 for NE states and UT.
- **Aim & Objectives:** Increase India's domestic production of edible oils by promoting the cultivation of oil palm trees, reduce dependence on imports and enhance farmers income and livelihood.

Palm Oil

- It is widely used edible vegetable oil derived from the fruit of the oil palm tree. Around 90% of the world's oil palm trees are grown on a few islands in Malaysia and Indonesia.

- India is the world's largest palm oil importer & second largest consumer of palm oil.

- Indonesia and Malaysia are the two main exporters of palm oil to India at 61% and 32% respectively in 2020.

Source: TH

FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY ASSESSMENT TEST (FLNAT)

In News

- The Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education recently conducted the **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT)**, unde**r the ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram Initiative.**

About FLNAT

- FLNAT is a nationwide assessment test conducted as part of the ULLAS initiative.

- It aims to evaluate the foundational literacy and numeracy skills of registered non-literate learners aged 15 and above.

- The assessment comprises three subjects - Reading, Writing, and Numeracy - each carrying 50 marks, totalling 150 marks. This test is developed to evaluate the foundational literacy and numeracy skills of registered non-literate learners.

ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) Initiative

- It aims to bridge the gap in basic literacy and critical life skills among citizens aged 15 and above.

- The program targets individuals who may have missed formal education opportunities. It equips them with basic literacy skills like reading, writing, and numeracy.

- ULLAS goes beyond basic literacy by imparting essential life skills like digital literacy, financial literacy, and legal awareness. This empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of modern life.

Source: PIB

CINEMATOGRAPH (CERTIFICATION) RULES, 2024

Context:

- **The Union government** has notified the **Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024**, in order to improve the process of certification of films for public exhibition.

About:

- These new rules **aim to streamline and modernise the film certification process for the digital age**, keeping pace with the emerging technologies and advancement in the film sector.

- A comprehensive revision of the Rules has been done **to fully align it with the adoption of online certification processes, which will ensure enhanced transparency, efficiency and ease of doing business** for the film industry, said the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.**

Cinematograph (Certification) Rules, 2024

- **Age-based indicators:** While the 'U' (unrestricted public exhibition), 'A' (restricted to adults) and 'S' (restricted for specialised viewing) categories of certification have been left unaltered, **the new age-based indicators within the 'UA' category will be visible on the certificates.**

  - **The existing UA category further subdivided into three age-based categories:** seven years (UA 7+), 13 years (UA 13+), and 16 years (UA 16+), instead of 12 years.

  - These age-based markers would be **only recommendatory,** meant for the parents or guardians to consider whether their children should view such a film.

- **At least one-third women representation:** The Union Government may take such steps as it thinks fit to appoint women members in the Board so that there is due representation for women, where one-third of the members in the Board shall be women and preferably half shall be womens.

- **Third parties:** T**he role of third parties in the certification process has been totally done away with** in the wake of allegations of bribery against middlemen.

- **The applications can only be submitted online**: Every application to certify a film for public exhibition shall be made on the online portal of the Board, hereinafter referred to as the e-cinepramaan portal.

- **Perpetual Validity:** The new rules also provide that a certificate granted by the CBFC will be perpetually valid. As of now, a certificate was only valid for 10 years, after which a film had to be recertified.

- **Re-certifying a film:** As per the 2024 draft rules, any application to recertify or change the category of a film for exhibition on television or media other than the medium originally certified can be made on the **e-cinepramaan portal.**

- **Accessibility features:** In another development, the government has notified the guidelines for the **accessibility of persons with hearing and visual impairment to films.**

  - The guidelines provide **at least one accessibility feature** each for the hearing impaired and visually impaired viz. closed captioning and audio description.

Source: TH

ICECUBE: THE BIG, CHILL NEUTRINO-SPOTTER

Context:

- Scientists reported recently that **they have found instances in IceCube's data from 2011 to 2020 that matched the signature of tau type of neutrinos,** with more than 99.999999% confidence.

About The IceCube:

- **The IceCube neutrino observatory** is a device at the **earth's South Pole** that **detects subatomic particles called neutrinos.**

- It was built and is maintained by the **IceCube Collaboration**, which consists of many universities worldwide led by the **University of Wisconsin, Madison.**

- IceCube consists of **thousands of sensors buried more than 1.4 km beneath the ice** plus multiple detectors above the surface.

Neutrinos

- Neutrinos are **light particles that very rarely interact with matter**. This is why they're called **"ghost particles".**

- **Neutrinos come in different types:** electron neutrino, Muon neutrino and Tau neutrino.

- By some estimates, a human-sized neutrino detector will have to wait for a century for a single neutrino to interact with a sensor. **The larger the detector's collecting area, the higher the chances of spotting neutrinos**.

How Icecube detects neutrinos?

- IceCube is the **world's biggest 'neutrino telescope';** its sensors are distributed throughout a cubic kilometre of ice.

- When a neutrino interacts with the ice surrounding the sensors, it **may produce some charged particles and some radiation.**

- The sensors **detect the radiation to infer the detection of a neutrino** and use the radiation's properties to understand more about the particle.

Source:TH

SCALABLE INSTRUCTABLE MULTIWORLD AGENT (SIMA)

Context

- Google DeepMind revealed its latest AI gaming agent called SIMA or Scalable Instructable Multiworld Agent.

What is SIMA?

- SIMA is an AI Agent, which is different from AI models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google Gemini.

  - AI models are trained on a vast data set and are limited when it comes to working on their own. On the other hand, an **AI Agent can process data and take action themselves.**

- It is a super-smart computer programme that can be thought of as a digital explorer, having the ability to understand what a person wants and help create it in the virtual world.

Features

- It is capable of **learning and adapting through the interactions** it has with the user. This makes it better at understanding and fulfilling user requests.

- It can **follow natural language instructions** to perform tasks across video game environments.

Source: IE

HBA1C TEST

Context

- To diagnose pre-diabetes and diabetes (both type 1 and type 2), the hemoglobin A1C (HbA1C) test, also known as the glycated hemoglobin or glycosylated hemoglobin test is used.

Background

- India accounts for **17%** of all diabetes patients in the world.

- Over **35%** of Indians suffer from hypertension and nearly 40% from abdominal obesity, both of which are risk factors for diabetes.

How does the test work?

- Sugar or glucose enters the bloodstream from the food it attaches to the hemoglobin in the red blood cells.

  - **Hemoglobin is a protein** that transports oxygen to all the cells of your body.

- Everybody has some sugar attached to their hemoglobin. Those with pre-diabetes and diabetes, however, have more.

- The **HbA1C test measures the percentage of the red blood cells that have sugar-coated**, or glycated, hemoglobin.

Test Results

- The HbA1C levels are provided as either a percentage or in **mmol/mol** (which stands for millimoles per mole).

- An Hb1A1C **below 5.7% is considered normal;** between 5.7 and 6.4% may indicate you are pre-diabetic; and 6.5% or higher can indicate diabetes.

Types of diabetes
• **Type 1 diabetes:** The body does not make insulin since the immune system attacks and destroys the cells in your pancreas that make insulin.   ◆ Type 1 diabetes is usually **diagnosed in children and young adults,** although it can appear at any age.

> - ◆ People with type 1 diabetes need to take insulin every day to stay alive.
> - **Type 2 diabetes:** The body does not make or use insulin well.
>   - ◆ One can develop type 2 diabetes at any age, even during childhood. However, this type of diabetes occurs most often in middle-aged and older people.
>   - ◆ Type 2 is the **most common** type of diabetes.

Source: TH

LISUS AND SINGPHOS COMMUNITIES

In News

- It is observed that Children of the Lisu and Singpho communities are named according to the order they are born in the family, incorporating numbers into their names.

About communities

- **Lisus** :The Lisus belong to the **Tibeto-Burman family** and inhabit the contiguous hilly regions of **Arunachal Pradesh, China, Myanmar**, and **Thailand**.
  - ◆ They number about 5,000 in India.
  - ◆ Lisu boys and girls have separate sets of numbered names to indicate the order of their birth. The eldest girl in a family has Ana in her name, and the ones after her are called Angyi, Acha, Ado, Achhi, Ata, Akhu, Agu, Aju, and Apshi, for a tenth daughter.
- **Singphos:** It is an ethnic group inhabiting 27 countries, including China's Yunnan province.
  - ◆ In India, they mostly inhabit the Changlang and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh, and the Tinsukia district of Assam.

Source : TH

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