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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**INDIA NEEDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH REGULATORY AGENCY**

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INDIA NEEDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH REGULATORY AGENCY

Context

- Experts and policymakers are advocating for the establishment of an **Environmental Health Regulatory Agency (EHRA) in India** to focus on comprehensive and cohesive environmental governance amid rapid economic growth, coupled with increasing pollution levels.

About

- India is at a critical juncture in its environmental and public health journey. Rapid economic growth has brought significant environmental challenges, including increased greenhouse gas emissions and deteriorating public health indicators.
- To address these interconnected issues, experts and policymakers are advocating for the establishment of an Environmental Health Regulatory Agency (EHRA).

Need for EHRA in India

- **Health Impacts of Environmental Pollution:** Numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental health effects of exposure to air, water, and soil pollutants.
 - ◆ For instance, exposure to PM2.5 is associated with respiratory, cardiovascular, and metabolic diseases, as well as adverse pregnancy outcomes and mental health disorders.
 - ◆ Vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and financially disadvantaged groups, are at higher risk.
- **Integrated Environmental and Health Governance:** Currently, India's environmental governance is managed by multiple agencies, including the *Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)* and the *Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)*.
 - ◆ However, there is a **lack of coordination** between these bodies and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), **leading to fragmented efforts** in pollution control and health risk mitigation.
- **Comprehensive Data Management:** An EHRA would centralise environmental and health data, providing a comprehensive view of environmental health risks.
 - ◆ This integration would facilitate better decision-making and policy formulation, allowing for more effective tracking, regulation, and mitigation of environmental health impacts.
- **Holistic Policy Approach:** The agency would enable the development of policies that simultaneously address pollution control and health risk mitigation.
 - ◆ It is essential for tackling the interconnected issues of climate, environment, health, and the economy.
- **Enhanced Public Health Outcomes:** By focusing on reducing exposure to environmental pollutants, the EHRA can help mitigate the health impacts of air, water, and soil pollution.
 - ◆ It is particularly important for vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and financially disadvantaged groups.

Important Environmental Legislation in India

- **The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986:** It empowers the central government to take measures to protect and improve the environment.
 - ◆ It provides the framework for the coordination of various environmental regulations and the establishment of authorities to tackle specific environmental issues.
- **The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981:** It aims to control and reduce air pollution by **establishing pollution control boards at the central and state levels**.
 - ◆ These boards are responsible for monitoring air quality and enforcing regulations to reduce emissions from industrial and vehicular sources.
- **The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974:** It focuses on preventing and controlling water pollution.
 - ◆ It establishes **pollution control boards to oversee the implementation of policies and regulations** aimed at maintaining and restoring the quality of water resources.

- **The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** It provides for the protection of wild animals, birds, and plants.
 - ♦ It establishes protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries and regulates hunting, poaching, and trade in wildlife.
- **The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980:** It aims to conserve forests and regulate deforestation.
 - ♦ It requires prior approval from the central government for the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes and emphasizes the sustainable use of forest resources.
- **The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010:** It establishes the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to handle cases related to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
 - ♦ The NGT provides a specialised forum for the expeditious disposal of environmental cases.

Benefits of an EHRA

- **Integrated Data Management:** By consolidating data from various sources, the EHRA can provide a comprehensive view of environmental health risks, facilitating better decision-making and policy formulation.
 - ♦ It allows for more effective tracking, regulation, and mitigation of environmental health impacts
- **Holistic Policy Approach:** The agency would enable the development of policies that simultaneously address pollution control and health risk mitigation, leading to more cohesive and effective governance.
 - ♦ It aims to bridge the gap between environmental monitoring and health impact assessments, ensuring a holistic approach to environmental governance.
- **Enhanced Public Health:** With a focus on reducing exposure to environmental pollutants, the EHRA can help mitigate the health impacts of air, water, and soil pollution, particularly for vulnerable populations.
- **Enhanced Compliance and Enforcement:** A centralised agency could streamline enforcement mechanisms, ensuring better compliance with environmental regulations.

Concerns and Challenges in Establishing EHRA

- Establishing an EHRA will require overcoming several challenges, including bureaucratic barriers, stakeholder resistance, and the need for scientific expertise and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Bureaucratic Inertia:** The existing environmental governance framework is fragmented, with responsibilities spread across multiple ministries and departments.
 - ♦ Integrating these functions into a single agency requires significant administrative restructuring and coordination.
- **Industry Resistance:** Industries may resist stricter regulations and oversight due to concerns about increased operational costs and compliance burdens.
 - ♦ Effective stakeholder engagement and clear communication about the long-term benefits of improved environmental health standards are essential to mitigate this resistance.
- However, the potential benefits for public health and environmental sustainability make it a crucial step for India's future.

Conclusion

- Establishing an Environmental Health Regulatory Agency in India is essential for addressing the profound and immediate environmental health challenges the country faces.
- By integrating environmental and health data, the EHRA can lead to more comprehensive and cohesive environmental governance, ultimately improving public health outcomes and ensuring sustainable development.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

Do you believe that India urgently requires a dedicated environmental health regulatory agency to effectively address the growing challenges posed by environmental pollution and its impact on public health? Justify your stance with relevant examples and arguments.