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6th January 2022

Topic: Health Scheme

Importance: Punjab PCS Mains

What is the news?

- The Punjab Government is giving free treatment to the people who are suffering from Motia Abhiyan under '**Chief Minister Punjab, Motia Mukt Abhiyan**'.
- During this time patients are also given medicines and glasses along with refreshment and transportation facilities.
- Government of Punjab under 'Mukh Mantri Punjab, Motia Mukt Abhiyan' is providing free treatment to people suffering from cataract. Patients are being provided refreshments, medicines, pick & drop facility and spectacles also.

(Source: Punjab Government)

Topic: Punjab's New Mining Policy.

Importance: Punjab PCS Mains

What is the news?

- The new policy now allows all farmers to extract up to 3 feet of land from their fields without any environmental clearance certificate.
- The Punjab government had recently come up with the new sand and gravel mining policy 2021, which states that landowners **can dispose of ordinary earth extracted or removed during the leveling of their Agricultural fields up to 3-feet.**

Challenges:

- Several sand dealers revealed that both individual farmers and Panchayats, which own large village chunks of common land, are very much interested in getting mined their fields up to 3 feet and they are contacting them to bargain the rates. It is a lucrative business and they are getting a good amount.
- "If they are removing even a single cubic feet of earth from one acre, they would get Rs 3 to 3.5 lakh and by removing up to 3-cubic feet they would earn Rs 9 to 11 lakh from a single acres as we are paying them Rs 8 to 9 per cubic feet sand," said a dealer in Jalandhar, adding that several farmers have asked him to remove sand from their fields after the harvesting of wheat.

What will happen to the soil if even one foot of excavation takes place on agricultural fields?

- According to soil experts, the upper soil layer is the best quality soil that contains all the important nutrients. Dr O P Chaudhary, principal soil chemist and Head of the Department of the Soil Science at Punjab Agriculture University (PAU), Ludhiana, said that once this upper layer or soil head, which is the most fertile, is mined, this would mean destroying the most fertile layer and this destruction is “forever”, and irreparable.
- It will take hundreds or even thousands of years to form it again. He said that all the important nutrients of the soil are available up to 60 cm till the root zone layer of the crops, and the first 6 inches are the most important one. “The first 3-foot excavation means to kill the best soil completely,” he added.
- “This is a short-term win and farmers should not be doing it because it will lead to logging of water in the lowlands. And if the surrounding areas of such fields are at a higher level, then these fields would turn turn a drain for the surrounding areas,” said Dr RK Gupta, principal soil chemist, Department of Soil Sciences, PAU, adding that a brick or a house can be made from the unproductive soil but crops cannot be grown in non fertile soil.

Can farmers save the topsoil if they still want to get sand out of their fields?

- Experts have said that, first of all, agricultural land should not be destroyed in this way. However, if they want to opt for mining, they should get the upper layer collected till up to six inches to one feet on one side of the field and after getting that mined, it should be

spread on the field again to retain the best quality sand.

What was the earlier law about the mining fields?

- Earlier, farmers were required to take environment clearance for mining their fields and as per norms, no agricultural land can be excavated to 3-meters after procuring an environmental clearance certificate. If this rule was flouted then an FIR was to be registered against the owner of the land, panchayat (if it is panchayati land), forest officer (if the land belongs to the forest department), and Block Development and Panchayat Officer (BDPOs) or any other owner.

(Source: Indian Express)

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