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- ❖ **India-EU Cooperation in Counter-terrorism**
- ❖ **India & Afghan Refugee Crisis**
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THIRD CONCEPT NOW UGC-CARE List

Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

INSIDE

Editorial	
Menace of Air Pollution	5
<i>B.K.</i>	
India-EU Cooperation in Counter-terrorism	7
<i>Dr. Anju Sharma & Ms. Shivani Seth</i>	
India's Response to Afghan Refugee Crisis	11
<i>Bhaswati Sarmah</i>	
Crimes against Women in India: An Analysis	15
<i>Dr. Upen Konch</i>	
Reigniting Debate over AFPSA in Nagaland?	20
<i>Manish Sharma</i>	
The Plight of Women in Unorganized Sector	22
<i>Dr. Raghavendra Gudagunti & Renuka Manikappa</i>	
Perspectives on Surrogacy	24
<i>Dr. Alka Mudgal</i>	
Reflection of Adolescent Health Issues.....	28
<i>Kaustuva Banerjee & Dr. Debasri Banerjee</i>	
Emerging Strategy for Rural Retailing	31
<i>Dr. Satya Prakash Pandey & Dr. Abhishek Chowdhary</i>	
Global Gift Industry—a Case Study	34
<i>Dr Ajay Mehta</i>	
Corporate Ethics - Misuse of Institutional....	37
<i>Dr. Tausif Mistry & Dr. Shikha Sindhu</i>	
Violence against Women during Covid-19	39
<i>Dr. Sanjeda Warsi & Dr. Mushtaq A. Rather</i>	
Freud for Today's Times: Predicament.....	42
<i>Dr. Jyoti Dalal, Chetan Anand, Dr. Mila Tuli</i>	
A Bibliometric Approach to Entrepreneurship...	45
<i>Subin M K & Dr. Shacheendran V</i>	
Educational Mobility among the Gaddi Tribe....	47
<i>Ashwani Kumar & Dr. Rajneesh</i>	
Strategy of Mentoring in Higher Educational.....	51
<i>Dr Mukund M Munargi & Dr Ramesh Kamble</i>	
Role of Women in Kolar Region	54
<i>K.N. Srinivasagowda & Dr. K.L.N. Murthy</i>	
Social Status of Widowhood	56
<i>Bhimashankar & Dr. Laxman Kawale</i>	
Shakespearian Perception of Eulogizing	57
<i>Dr. C. Alex Rajakumar Paul</i>	

Menace of Air Pollution

Air pollution has come to be reckoned with to be the largest global environmental health threat, accounting for seven million deaths worldwide every year. Many diseases, ranging from asthma to cancer, lung illness, and heart diseases are either caused or aggravated by air pollution. According to estimates, daily economic cost incurred on account of air pollution has been estimated at \$ 8 billion, or 3 to 4% of the gross world product (GWP). Affecting primarily the most vulnerable segments of the population, air pollution claimed deaths of 40, 000 children under the age of five years, and these children were directly linked to PM 2.5 air pollution. And at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is still around us, scientists have found that exposure to PM 2.5 enhances both the risk of contracting the virus and of suffering more severe symptoms when infected, including death.

The World Health Organization (WHO) released in September 2021 a timely and ambitious update to its global air quality guidelines, after a hiatus of 15 years since the last WHO update was released in 2006, and while acknowledging the important impact of air pollution on global health, the WHO cut the recommended annual PM 2.5 concentration to half from 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ down to 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, with the ultimate goal of preventing millions of deaths.

While data for the 2020 World Air Quality Report was garnered from 4,745 locations in 106 countries and regions, the 2021 World Air Quality Report included data from 6,475 locations in 117 countries, territories, and regions. This in part could be attributed to the increasing number of low-cost air-quality sensors mostly operated by non-profit organizations, governments, and citizen scientists. The increase in the number of PM 2.5 stations has seemingly been instrumental in creating a more accurate picture of hyper-local air quality, and global air quality.

Public health and scientific communities have often emphasized unanimity about the causal relationship between air pollution exposure and adverse health effects. Nevertheless, connecting the dots between physically measured air pollution levels, represented in the 2021 World Air Quality report as PM 2.5 concentrations in micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), and the resulting exposure-related health risks requires additional context. The first report on global air quality guidelines was published by WHO in 1987, and these guidelines were crafted as a tool providing quantitative evidence-based health information on the issue of disease caused by air pollution. According to some experts, the WHO guidelines are designed to assist policymakers around the globe in crafting air quality legislation and emissions' standards to levels that meaningfully reduce the public health risks posed by air pollution.

India has been one of the most affected countries in the world by air pollution. According to a report by The Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health, as many as 2.5 million died in India because of pollution, a figure which was highest in the world, and the number of deaths worldwide due to pollution stood at 9 million in 2015, a figure three times more than AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined.

According to some experts, the rapid pace of industrialization, with increased emphasis on shifting mining and manufacturing to developing countries where environmental regulations and enforcement were lax, could be attributed as one of the causes contributing to air pollution. Exposure to high levels of air pollution, specifically over many years, entails the potential of affecting human respiratory and inflammatory systems and can lead to heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. These experts also argue that people in poorer countries are more vulnerable and exposed to air pollution and less able to protect themselves from exposure in their place of work or residence. Besides, stereotyped practices of cooking on open fires with wood or coal in many poorer countries expose the people – mainly women and children – to dangerous fumes.

With air pollution emerging as one of the biggest threats to human health, alongside climate change, the essentiality of improving air quality assumes significance in enhancing climate change mitigation efforts, while diminution in emissions will in turn improve air quality. While striving to abide by WHO guideline levels, there is also a need for endeavours to engage, educate governments, researchers, civil society, corporate sector, and common people to work together to improve air quality and envisage healthier communities and cities.

— BK