



# CURRENT AFFAIRS



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## RIGHT TO PALLIATIVE CARE

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "RIGHT TO PALLIATIVE CARE ". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "SOCIETY" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

### WHY IN THE NEWS?

On March 7, 2024, in response to a public interest litigation, a three-member Bench of the Supreme Court chaired by the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud observed that the right to health includes the right to palliative care.

### MORE ABOUT THE NEWS

Palliative care is a specialized medical care that focuses on **providing relief from the symptoms and stress of a serious illness**. Its goal is to improve the quality of life for both the patient and their family. Palliative care **addresses physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, aiming to alleviate pain, manage symptoms**, and offer support throughout the course of an illness, particularly for individuals with chronic or life-threatening conditions. It can be provided alongside curative treatment or as the main form of care, depending on the patient's needs and preferences.

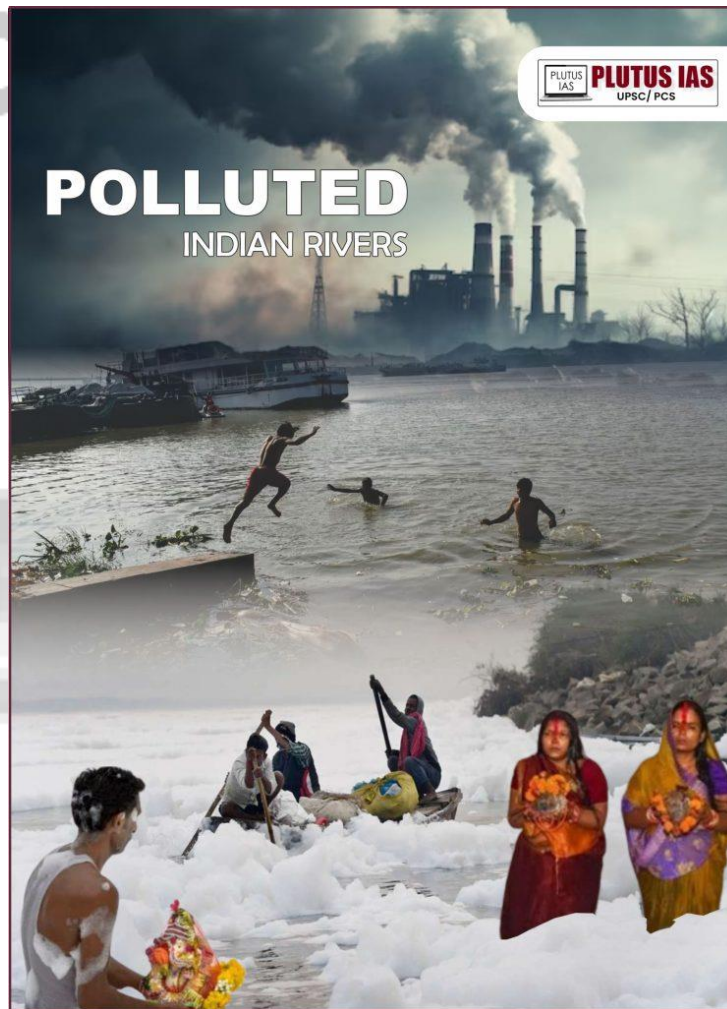
Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States, passed away in 2004 at the age of 93, succumbing to dementia after a nine-year battle. His wife, Nancy Reagan, described his peaceful passing as the "greatest gift" he could have given her. In contrast, India's former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee died in 2018, nine years after a stroke left him wheelchair-bound. The final 35 days of his life were spent in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, where he relied on artificial life support systems before his eventual demise.

These two contrasting incidents highlight the importance of Living will which was highlighted by the Supreme court.

### CHALLENGES OF PALLIATIVE CARE IN INDIA

1. **Limited Access:** Palliative care services are often concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural and remote areas underserved. This geographic disparity in access to palliative care means that many patients, particularly those in rural areas, do not receive the care and support they need.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** There is a lack of awareness and understanding about palliative care among the general public, healthcare providers, and policymakers in India. This results in misconceptions about palliative care, leading to underutilization of services and delayed referrals.

3. **Inadequate Training:** Healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, and other allied healthcare professionals, often receive inadequate training in palliative care. This lack of training limits their ability to effectively manage symptoms, provide psychosocial support, and engage in end-of-life discussions with patients and their families.
4. **Limited Integration:** Palliative care is not fully integrated into the healthcare system in India. Many hospitals and healthcare facilities do not have dedicated palliative care teams or protocols in place for the provision of palliative care services. This lack of integration results in missed opportunities to address the palliative care needs of patients with serious illnesses.
5. **Resource Constraints:** There is a shortage of essential resources for palliative care, including medications, medical equipment, and trained personnel. This shortage limits the ability of healthcare providers to deliver high-quality palliative care services and meet the growing demand for such care.
6. **Cultural and Social Stigma:** There are cultural and social stigmas associated with serious illness, end-of-life care, and death in India, which can impact the acceptance and utilization of palliative care services. Fear, shame, and misconceptions about death and dying may prevent patients and their families from seeking palliative care support.



## LIVING WILL

A living will, also known as an advance directive, is a legal document that allows individuals to specify their preferences regarding medical treatment and end-of-life care in the event that they become unable

to communicate their wishes due to illness or incapacity. The concept of a living will is based on the principle of autonomy and the right of individuals to make decisions about their own healthcare.

In a living will, individuals can outline their preferences regarding the use of life-sustaining treatments such as CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), mechanical ventilation, artificial nutrition and hydration, and other medical interventions. They can specify under what circumstances they would want these treatments to be administered or withheld, based on their values, beliefs, and quality-of-life considerations.

Living wills are legally binding documents when executed according to the laws of the jurisdiction in which they are created. They typically require witnesses or notarization to validate the document. Healthcare providers are obligated to honor the directives outlined in a living will to the extent permitted by law and in accordance with medical standards and ethical guidelines.

Living wills serve several important purposes:

1. **Ensuring Autonomy:** Living wills allow individuals to retain control over their medical care even if they are unable to communicate their wishes. By specifying their preferences in advance, individuals can ensure that their healthcare decisions align with their values and preferences.
2. **Relieving Burden on Family:** Living wills can help alleviate the burden on family members and loved ones who may otherwise be tasked with making difficult medical decisions on behalf of the individual. Having clear directives in a living will can reduce uncertainty and conflict among family members during times of crisis.
3. **Promoting Dignity:** Living wills enable individuals to express their desires regarding end-of-life care and the preservation of their dignity. By outlining their preferences for medical treatment, individuals can ensure that their wishes are respected and that they receive care that is consistent with their values and beliefs.
4. **Facilitating Communication:** Living wills encourage discussions about healthcare preferences and end-of-life care between individuals, their loved ones, and healthcare providers. These discussions can help clarify values, preferences, and expectations, fostering shared understanding and informed decision-making.

Overall, living wills are valuable tools for individuals to assert their autonomy and ensure that their healthcare preferences are respected, even in situations where they are unable to advocate for themselves. They provide peace of mind and guidance for both individuals and their loved ones during challenging times.

## EVOLUTION OF LIVING WILL IN INDIA

1. **Legal Recognition:** Living wills were formally recognized in India with the passage of the landmark judgment by the Supreme Court in the case of *Common Cause v. Union of India* in March 2018. In this judgment, the Supreme Court recognized the right to make an advance directive for medical treatment and upheld the legality of passive euthanasia (withdrawal or withholding of life-sustaining treatment) under certain circumstances.
2. **Legislative Framework:** Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Government of India introduced the "The Terminally Ill Patients (Protection of Patients and Medical Practitioners) Bill, 2016," commonly known as the "Living Will Bill." This bill proposed a legislative framework for the creation and implementation of living wills, outlining the procedures and safeguards for

their validity and enforcement. However, the bill lapsed with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha in 2019.

3. **Subsequent Legal Developments:** In subsequent years, various state governments and medical bodies in India have taken steps to provide guidance and frameworks for the implementation of living wills. For example, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) released guidelines on advance directives and end-of-life care in 2018, providing recommendations for healthcare providers and patients regarding the creation and utilization of living wills.

Ankit Kumar

## POLLUTED INDIAN RIVERS

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "POLLUTED INDIAN RIVERS". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "ENVIRONMENT" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

### WHY IN THE NEWS?

The pollution levels in the tributaries of the Ganga River in Uttarakhand have escalated significantly, particularly in Udham Singh Nagar district, where three out of the five most polluted rivers are located. Recent reports from the Uttarakhand Environment Protection and Pollution Control Board indicate concerning levels of contamination, underscoring a critical environmental issue in the area.

### REASONS BEHIND POLLUTED RIVERS

- **Industrial Waste:** Industries and manufacturing facilities worldwide play a significant role in water pollution by generating waste containing hazardous chemicals and pollutants. Inadequate waste management systems result in the release of industrial waste into nearby freshwater systems, leading to the contamination of rivers and streams.
- **Marine Dumping:** Various countries often dispose of household waste in oceans, contributing to marine pollution. These materials can take extensive periods to decompose fully, negatively impacting marine ecosystems and water quality.
- **Sewage and Wastewater:** Even after treatment, sewage and wastewater contain harmful chemicals, bacteria, and pathogens. Discharging sewage and wastewater into water bodies introduces disease-causing agents, posing risks to both human health and aquatic life.
- **Oil Leaks and Spills:** Oil leaks and spills, frequently stemming from oil drilling operations or ships transporting oil, represent significant sources of water pollution. Oil does not dissolve in water, leading to adverse effects on marine life and ecosystems.
- **Agricultural runoff:** The use of chemicals and pesticides in agriculture for crop protection can infiltrate groundwater, posing risks to animals, plants, and humans. During rainfall, these substances combine with rainwater, eventually flowing into rivers and streams, exacerbating water pollution.
- **Global Warming:** Increasing temperatures attributed to global warming present a challenge concerning water pollution. Elevated water temperatures can contribute to the decline of aquatic organisms, worsening pollution issues. Mitigating global warming can aid in reducing water pollution in rivers and other water bodies.
- **Deforestation and soil erosion:** Clearing of forests and soil erosion result in sedimentation and nutrient runoff into rivers, altering water quality and ecosystem health.



- **Urban runoff:** Stormwater runoff from urban areas can carry pollutants such as oil, heavy metals, and litter into rivers, increasing pollution levels.
- **Plastic pollution:** Plastic waste, including bags, bottles, and microplastics, can enter rivers through littering or improper disposal, harming wildlife and disrupting ecosystems.

## CONSEQUENCES OF POLLUTED RIVERS

- **Human Health Impact:** Water pollution poses significant health hazards to human beings, resulting in ailments such as gastrointestinal issues, skin disorders, malnutrition, and even cancer. Contaminated water reservoirs are responsible for waterborne diseases, leading to approximately 829,000 fatalities annually on a global scale.
- **Ecosystem Degradation:** Water pollution exerts a profound influence on various aquatic ecosystems, encompassing freshwater bodies, coastal regions, and oceanic environments. The introduction of diverse pollutants, including chemicals, pathogens, and alterations like increased temperatures, instigates the deterioration of aquatic ecosystems, disrupting biodiversity and upsetting the equilibrium of aquatic life forms.
- **Eutrophication:** The excessive influx of nutrients into water sources due to pollution can initiate eutrophication, a process characterised by the depletion of dissolved oxygen in water. This phenomenon often results in the demise of fish and other aquatic organisms, upsetting the natural equilibrium of aquatic ecosystems.
- **Industrial and Agricultural Contributions:** Industrial operations and contemporary agricultural techniques emerge as principal sources of water pollution. Industries discharge hazardous chemicals, organic substances, and pollutants into water bodies, while agricultural practices introduce pesticides and germicides containing chemicals that infiltrate water reservoirs, leading to the eutrophication of freshwater lakes.
- **Global Impact:** Water pollution constitutes a pervasive global environmental concern, exacerbated by factors such as urbanisation, population expansion, industrial output, and climate change. Improper waste disposal, industrial effluent release, and urban runoff collectively contribute to the degradation of water quality, adversely impacting human health and ecosystems on a worldwide scale.
- **Social and Cultural Impacts:** Water pollution disproportionately affects marginalised communities and indigenous populations, exacerbating social inequalities and injustices. Indigenous cultures and traditions tied to waterways suffer when pollution damages sacred sites, disrupt traditional fishing practices, and threatens cultural heritage.

## HOW IS RIVER POLLUTION CALCULATED?

Water pollution is often assessed and quantified through various parameters, with two common indicators being Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD).

- **Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD):**
  1. BOD measures the amount of dissolved oxygen consumed by microorganisms while decomposing organic matter in water.
  2. It indicates the level of organic pollution in water, as higher BOD values suggest a greater amount of organic material present that bacteria will decompose, consequently depleting oxygen levels.
  3. BOD is typically expressed in milligrams of oxygen consumed per litre of water (mg/L) over a specified period, commonly 5 days (BOD<sub>5</sub>).
- **Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD):**

1. COD measures the amount of oxygen required to chemically oxidise organic and inorganic matter in water.
2. Unlike BOD, which relies on microbial action, COD utilises chemical reactions to quantify both organic and inorganic pollutants.
3. COD results can provide a more rapid assessment of pollution levels compared to BOD, as it doesn't depend on microbial activity and can include a broader range of pollutants.
4. COD is also expressed in milligrams per litre (mg/L) of oxygen consumed, but the test typically takes less time to complete compared to BOD testing.

### INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT

- **National Water Policy (2012):** This policy seeks to recognize the current situation and propose a framework for establishing a system of laws and institutions, along with a coordinated national action plan. Initiated by the Ministry of Water Resources, it underscores the significance of water for human survival and economic development endeavours. It suggests strategies to conserve water resources through efficient, cost-effective, sustainable, and fair means.
- **National Water Mission (2010):** This mission strives for integrated water resource management to promote water conservation, minimise wastage, ensure fair distribution, and formulate improved policies.
- **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG):** This initiative envisions a five-tier structure at the national, state, and district levels to implement measures for preventing, controlling, and mitigating environmental pollution in the Ganga River. Its objective is to maintain a consistent and sufficient flow of water to rejuvenate the Ganga River.

### PRELIMS PRACTISE QUESTION

#### Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Carbon Monoxide is responsible for acid rain.
2. Harmful algal blooms are the primary cause of "red tide" events in marine environments.

#### Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**ANSWER: B**

#### Q2. Which parameter is more suitable for quickly assessing pollution levels in water samples?

- (a) BOD
- (b) COD
- (c) Both are equally suitable
- (d) Neither is suitable for quick assessment

**ANSWER: B**

### MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

**Q2. Discuss the social and cultural impacts of water pollution, emphasising how marginalised communities and indigenous populations are disproportionately affected.**

**Himanshu Mishra**

