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News: What is the proposal to ban the sale of single cigarettes?

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare**, in its latest report about cancer management, prevention and diagnosis, recommended that the government institute a ban on the sale of single sticks of cigarettes.
- It also recommended that the **government increase taxes on all tobacco products** and **utilise the acquired revenue for cancer prevention and awareness**.

New proposals

- Broadly, the **measures aim to curb consumption as well as the accessibility** of tobacco products.
- The report cites the National Health Policy's (2017) endeavour for a relative reduction in current tobacco use by 30% by 2025 and says it is imperative that the government take effective measures to contain the sale of tobacco products.
- To this effect, **it recommends that the government prohibit the sale of single sticks of cigarettes and suggests the abolition of all designated smoking areas in airports, hotels, and restaurants in addition to encouraging a smoke free policy in organisations**.

- The Committee also found that India has the lowest prices for tobacco products and thus, it must look to increase taxes on them.
- These measures flow from the observation that oral cancer accounts for the highest proportion of cancer cases in the country.
- Additionally, the committee also sought a ban on gutka and pan Masala alongside a prohibition on their direct and indirect advertisement.
- This is based on the observation that, in India, more than 80% of tobacco consumption is in the form of chewing tobacco, aggressively marketed as a mouth freshener.

Reasons behind focusing the single sticks

- Single sticks are more economical to acquire than a full pack of cigarettes.
- This may particularly appeal to adolescents and youth who may have limited money in hand.
- Single sticks are also preferred by people who may want to take them up for experimentation and have not started smoking on a regular basis.
- A ban on singlestick sales would compel a potential consumer to buy the entire pack which may not be particularly economical, thus curbing potential experimentation and the scope for regular intake.

- Moreover, a potential ban would also mean that the consumer would have to carry around the packet.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has observed that all forms of tobacco are harmful, and there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco.
- It also states that smoking cigarettes is the most common way of tobacco use worldwide.
- Moreover, the medical journal The Lancet noted in an editorial in June 2020, that by 2030, 7million annual deaths from smoking are expected to be from low and middle income countries.
- Singlestick sales, owing to their easier accessibility and affordability, can also work as a disincentive to quit smoking.
- Nicotine in tobacco products is highly addictive and without cessation support only 4% of users who attempt to quit tobacco consumption will succeed, according to the WHO.