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SC Order on Highway Dispute between Karnataka and Kerala

Why in News

The Supreme Court (SC) has asked the governments of Kerala and Karnataka to amicably settle the dispute over the closure of roads linking Kasaragod district (Kerala) to Mangaluru (Karnataka).

- The SC bench took up via video conferencing **an appeal against the Kerala High Court order** directing the opening of roads so that patients from Kasaragod can access emergency medical care facilities in Mangaluru.
- In its appeal before the Supreme Court, **Karnataka contended** that the opening of the roads would lead to law and order issues as local residents are wary of people from Kasaragod crossing over given that the district has the largest number of **COVID-19** cases in the country.

Highlights of the Judgement

- **On Kerala High Court's Order:** The bench did not stay the Kerala High Court order but asked the states not to precipitate matters.
- **Centre Mediation:** The Supreme Court asked the Centre to discuss the matter with the states and formulate parameters for passage of patients for urgent medical treatment.

Kerala High Court's Order

- **Order**

- The Kerala High Court had **directed the Centre** to ensure that blockades put up by Karnataka on national highways connecting it to Kerala are removed forthwith in order to facilitate free movement of vehicles carrying people for urgent medical treatment between the two states.
- The Kerala HC asked the Union government to intervene as the arterial roads that connect Mangalore to Kasaragod are **part of the national highway network**. Hence, it is the duty of the central government to ensure that roads are blockade- free.
- **Denial of health services** amounts to **infringement of right to life under Article 21** and also affects the **right to freedom of movement under Article 19(1) (d) of the Constitution**.
- **Court's Territorial Jurisdiction**
 - Before the High Court, **Karnataka** contended that **the court would be exceeding its territorial jurisdiction if it issues any direction**.
 - But **the court rejected** this and said that when a High Court of a state finds and declares the actions of the government of another State to be illegal and unconstitutional, the said **state government would be obliged to defer to the said declaration of law by a Constitutional Court of this country**, notwithstanding that the said court is situated beyond the territorial limits of the said state.
 - The Court held that the Karnataka government cannot therefore be heard to contend that it is not obliged to respect the fundamental right of a citizen who resides outside its territorial limits.

- **Basis of the Order:**

The High Court ruling came in the wake of the death of seven patients from Kasaragod who regularly availed hospital facilities in Mangaluru. The relatives of the deceased alleged that they could not cross the border due to the blockade imposed by Karnataka.

- **Background:**

- Even since **lockdown was announced on March 25** to arrest the spread of coronavirus, most states sealed off their inter-state borders to restrict movement of people. While essential services and goods vehicles were allowed to cross borders, as per the guidelines, some villages along the Karnataka side of the border with Kerala created a blockade, completely restricting movement of even essential services.
- Many roads connecting Kerala to Karnataka, particularly the roads from Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu districts of Karnataka linking Kasaragod in Kerala, have been blocked.

Source: IE

Grounding of Aircraft Affects Weather Forecasting

Why in News

Beginning mid-March, India began restricting incoming international flights into the country and by March 24 had imposed a total shutdown on domestic air travel as well to contain the spread of **Covid-19**.

- The grounding of India's civilian aircraft has strangled a key source of weather data that the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** uses for its forecasts.
- Officials from the IMD, however, have clarified that India's annual monsoon forecast system is on track, with the first forecast scheduled to be issued in mid-April.
A major factor for gauging the performance of the monsoon is the **El Nino**, a warming of the ocean waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. This data is measured by observational data buoys located in the sea and relayed via satellite. This **data is not impacted so far**.

Key Points

- **Aviation and Weather Data:**
 - Aircraft **relay data about temperature and wind speed** in the upper atmosphere to meteorological agencies the world over and this is used in the dynamical models.
 - Input from aircraft is important for the dynamical models as it determines the **initial conditions** for these models.
 - Aviation-generated data is also helpful to warn of **developing thunderstorms or swings in temperatures** that often begin at the heights aircraft traverse.
- **Dynamical model:**
 - Dynamic models are generally models that contain or depend upon an **element of time, especially allowing for interactions between variables over time**.
 - These stimulate the state of the atmosphere and oceans at a particular time and then extrapolate into the future using standard laws of physics.
 - These models are run on **supercomputers** and are relied on to give weather forecasts three days, or even two weeks ahead.
- **IMD will move to traditional weather forecasting system:**
 - This year, the IMD will likely rely on its traditional statistical forecast system, the one developed on the basis of historical data.
 - However, even this will be difficult due to shortage of manpower in the Department owing to Covid-19.
 - The IMD issues its first forecast for the June-September monsoon in April and updates it in June.

India and Weather Forecasting Model

- **Traditional Model:**

- **Until 2010**, the IMD used **only statistical models** to forecast the monsoon.
- These **involved identifying climate parameters** linked to the performance of the monsoon. For example, the sea surface temperature gradient between North Atlantic and North Pacific, the volume of warm water in the equatorial Pacific, the Eurasian snow cover.
- Their values in February and March are correlated to values of actual rainfall over a hundred years and then, using statistical techniques, extrapolated to forecast a particular year's monsoon.
- This has, however, proved wrong and the **IMD missed its mark on forecasting** major droughts and rain-deficits particularly 2002, 2004 and 2006.
- The IMD responded by finding new parameters but keeping the technique the same.

- **Dynamic Model:** IMD started testing a dynamical system around 2015.

- This **simulates the weather at a chosen set of locations on a given day** — the land and ocean temperature, moisture, wind speeds at various heights, etc — and **powerful computers** calculate how these weather variables will change over days, weeks, months.
- It's able to do this by solving physics equations that show how each of these weather variables is related to each other.
- The IMD and several private weather agencies are increasingly relying on more sophisticated and high-resolution computer models to give localised forecasts, or warn farmers of changes in weather 10-15 days ahead.

Rather than long-range forecasts that only give a broad tenuous picture of the likely performance of the monsoon, the shorter forecasts are far more reliable and help farmers make decisions about sowing.

- These models are also useful for **anticipating heat-wave or a cold-wave** and therefore useful to urban planners and government.
- Though meteorological agencies around the world are shifting to such techniques, they still aren't considered entirely reliable for forecasting the monsoon.
- Further, **India's dynamical model is still not as adept** as meteorologists want them to be, for **warning of a drought or extreme changes in monsoon rainfall.**

India Meteorological Department

- IMD was **established in 1875.**
- It is an agency of the **Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India.**

- It is the principal agency responsible for **meteorological observations, weather forecasting and seismology**.

Source: TH

Indian Migrants and Challenges

Why in News

Recently, the **Covid-19** lockdown has led to an exodus of migrant workers from cities to rural areas and threw the spotlight on the vast number of Indians who live outside their home states.

Internal Migrants (Movement of People Within a Country)

Internal migrants in India are a vast and heterogeneous population. They are of three traits (in general):

- they predominantly **migrate from villages to cities**;
- they are **low-income populations** who **work in the informal sector**;
- they have **not permanently relocated their families to the city**. Instead, they circulate between villages and cities several times a year.

Key Points

- **Reasons for Migration**
 - Lakhs of migrant workers were rendered jobless as urban areas were shut due to lockdown.
 - Night shelters run by local authorities began overflowing, and supplies started dwindling.
 - These migrants were left with no choice but to head towards their hometowns.
- Governments are of the view that the **migration crisis** is purely as a consequence of the challenges of Covid-19. However, some experts argue that there are some structural inadequacies in public understanding of **circular rural-urban migrants**.
Circular migration is the temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host areas, typically for the purpose of employment.

- **Structural Inadequacies**

- The first is an **inability to recognise the size and importance** of these communities.
 - The second is **inability to correctly count such migrants** because of the **informal conditions** in which they live and work, and **their shuttling between their villages and cities**.
 - These inabilities have real costs, **rendering governments ill-prepared to anticipate the responses of migrant communities at crucial moments**.
 - It is being said that the **policymakers were unprepared** for the speed and desperation with which these migrants attempted to return home following the lockdown order.
- The Supreme Court has stated that the migrants be treated in a humane manner, including by providing them with enough food, water, beds and supplies as well as psychosocial counselling in shelters that are run by volunteers and not security forces.

Way Forward

- **Recognition of circular migrants** as part of India's urban population.
 - It might compel authorities to at least consider how proposed policies might impact these communities.
 - At present, such ex-ante awareness would have allowed the government to decide whether to target scarce resources towards enabling safe return or keep migrants in destination cities.
- **Relaxing the restrictions** that prevent migrants from accessing vital benefits such as food rations in their destination cities. Reconfiguring the domicile-centric public distribution system can help migrants.
- **Prioritising dedicated transport options for migrants** to prevent overcrowding, especially along high-intensity migration corridors.
- Special Measures should also take into account the **particular situation of migrant women**, who are among those most economically vulnerable and impacted by the situation.

Source: HT

Free Testing and Treatment for Covid-19

Why in News

Recently, the Central government has decided to **provide free testing and treatment** of coronavirus under the **Ayushman Bharat Scheme or the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana** (PMJAY).

Key Points

- **Objective:**
 - To **increase the supply** of testing and treatment facilities.
 - To increase access by **roping in the private sector** through AB-PMJAY as per the **Indian Council for Medical Research** (ICMR) guidelines.
- It will help more than 50 crore Ayushman beneficiaries to **avail free testing and timely and standard treatment** in designated private hospitals across India.
- It will significantly **expand government's capacities** and **mitigate the adverse impact** of this **pandemic** on the poor.
- States have already enlisted private sector hospitals to convert them into **Covid-19 only hospitals**.
 - Hospitals can use their own authorised testing facilities or tie up with an authorised testing facility for the scheme.
 - These tests would be carried out as per the protocol set by ICMR and by **private labs approved/registered** by the ICMR.
- Information on **symptoms, testing and treatment** for the disease can be accessed from the website of the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** and by calling the **national Covid-19 helpline 1075**.

Ayushman Bharat

- It is a **government-sponsored health insurance scheme** which provides **free coverage of up to ₹5 lakh per family per year** at any government or even empanelled private hospitals all over India for secondary and tertiary medical care facilities.
- Modicare is available for 74 crore beneficiary families and about 50 crore Indian citizens. Under the process, 80 percent of beneficiaries, based on the **Socio-Economic Caste Census** (SECC) data in the rural and the urban areas, have been identified.
- There is **no restriction on the basis of family size, age or gender**.
- Ayushman Bharat is unlike other medical insurance schemes where there is a waiting period for pre-existing diseases. **All kinds of diseases are covered** from day one of the Ayushman Bharat policy. The benefit cover includes both **pre and post hospitalization expenses**.
- The expenditure incurred in premium payment will be shared between Central and State Governments in a specified ratio. The **funding** for the scheme is shared – **60:40 for all states and UTs** with their own legislature, **90:10 in Northeast states and Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand** and **100% Central funding for UTs without legislature**.
- It draws **additional resources** from the **Health and Education Cess** and also depends on funding from States to boost the Central allocation. The **premiums** are in the range of **₹1,000-₹1,200 per annum**.

- It **pays** for the hospitalisation costs of its beneficiaries **through strategic purchasing from public and private hospitals.**

Source: TH

Complete Export Ban on Hydroxychloroquine

Why in News

India has **banned all exports of hydroxychloroquine** - an **anti- malaria drug** that is being used **in the treatment of Covid-19.**

- This implies that the **exceptions (export obligation and humanitarian grounds)** mentioned in the previous order have come to an **end.**
- The **Directorate-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** had prohibited the export of the drug on 25th March, 2020. But it left the option of export open to fulfil **“export obligation”** and on **“humanitarian grounds”.**
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) organisation is an **attached office of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.** This Directorate, with headquarters at New Delhi, is **responsible for formulating and implementing the Foreign Trade Policy** with the main objective of promoting India’s exports.

Key Points

- The export of hydroxychloroquine and formulations made from hydroxychloroquine is **not even allowed** from **Special Economic Zones/ Export -Oriented Units (SEZs/EOUs)** or against **Advance Authorisation (AA)** or against full advance payment.
 - **SEZs** are treated as **foreign territory in terms of customs laws.** Normally, export ban or restrictions imposed by the government does not apply on these zones as well as **EOUs**, which are specially meant to promote outbound shipments from the country.
 - Under the **Advance Authorisation (AA)** scheme, firms are allowed to import raw material at zero duty but with the **condition of export obligation within a certified time frame.**

- **Reasons**

- India has **banned exports of a host of medical devices**, including sanitiser, all types of ventilators and surgical masks.
- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** has recommended the **use of hydroxychloroquine for treating healthcare workers** handling suspected or confirmed coronavirus cases and also the asymptomatic household contacts (showing no symptoms) of the lab-confirmed cases. It needs to be noted that **the drug is yet to be proven as a cure for the novel coronavirus**.
- All this has been done **to deal with the number of rising cases in the country**.

- **USA's Request**

- **India is considering the request** by the USA **to release the ordered amount of hydroxychloroquine drug**.

USA has been using the drug along with a combination of other drugs to treat COVID-19 patients. It is being said that the drug is yielding positive results.

- This can be viewed as **an opportunity for India's pharmaceutical industry to gain access to the USA markets**, but a call should be taken **only after considering domestic requirements**.
- This may provide India and the US with an opportunity to **sort out issues related to India's capping of prices of drugs and medical equipment** like stents that have figured prominently in trade disputes between the two countries.
- This can also be seen as India, despite a complete ban on exports, may give priority to the USA's request. This highlights the importance of India-US relationship.

Source: TH

Covid 19 and Economic Challenges Ahead

Why in News

Recently, India has rolled-out various policy measures to deal with **Covid-19**, India also has to brace for multiple impacts over an uncertain timeline that could last a year.

Key Points

- **Welfare Measures:** The government has taken various welfare measures (encompassing both food and money) to help the most vulnerable and also to partially meet the cost of retaining workers in smaller enterprises, for the next few months.

- **Test and Cost:** For the size of India's population, the quantum of tests conducted so far seems to be too few and the government should bear the entire cost for testing.
- **Compared to Developed Countries:** Emerging Market Economies (EME) like India, can hardly match what developed countries like the US, UK and Germany have announced.

These countries have basically set out to offset, through generous direct government entitlements to large sections of the population and extraordinary central bank activism, the adverse demand shock following the primary negative supply shock of the pandemic.

Challenges Ahead for India

- **Fiscal deficit:** India's national fiscal deficit is perpetually high, and it is about to get larger even without an increase in outlays.
 - Due to this first, revenues will decline sharply; and, secondly, state governments who are the first responders of the health emergency will be hard pressed.
- **Foreign Investment:** Foreign portfolio investment in Indian equity and bonds is about US\$ 300 billion. In March US\$ 15 billion exited. India's equity performance during March in dollar terms was low compared to other emerging market economies.
 - Over the past year, India relaxed prudential norms related to external flows management, opening up yet more the possibilities of surges and sudden stops of foreign capital.
- **Trade barrier:** India also imposed trade barriers to imports through higher custom duties.
 - It is well founded that high import barriers ultimately undermine national competitiveness and it is mostly export earnings that will have to service external liabilities.
- **Banking Sector:** Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) will spike in virtually all economies in the coming months. India's NPA ratio is over 9 percent highest, among the important economies.
 - Recent developments including that of private banks includes widely reported delays in resolution and the ad-hoc dilutions in regulations, which have not helped.
 - Neither has poor disclosure — late last year ten banks disclosed that for the previous financial year their NPAs were Rupees 26,500 crores higher than previously reported.
 - All this contributed to an increase in the banking sector's risk premium.
- **International investors:** international investors will begin to sharply distinguish between countries along the principal measure of how successfully the health challenge is being met, which will determine how quickly and durably individual economies will get back on their feet.

Way Forward

- Higher customs duties on imports must be checked, which will increase India's competitiveness and remove trade barriers.
- Issues related to the banking sector like NPAs must be dealt carefully.
- If the fiscal and monetary responses are strengthened, the likelihood of serious consequences for macroeconomic stability increases.

Source: IE

Online Classes due to Covid-19

Why in News

The **lockdown** due to the **Covid-19 pandemic** has led to closing of educational institutes like schools, colleges and coaching institutions.

The educational institutes are thus switching to **e-learning**.

Key Points

- **Different e-learning Techniques Being Used**
 - The **Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan** has deployed its **SWAYAM Prabha portal** which has lectures on **DTH (direct-to-home)** and online, to help students.
 - Few states are **trying to tap Doordarshan** to remove access barriers.
- **e-learning** poses a **challenge** to teachers, students and their parents over **technology and access** that is why the **effectiveness** of the instructors (teachers) can **not be analysed** and also not every student is joining the virtual classes.

- **Challenges**

- All of the students do not have laptops or tablet computers. Parents also use the computer for their work from home so children do not get a chance to use it.
- Teachers are apprehensive about students using smartphones because of distracting apps.
- Teachers too might have technical constraints and if teachers are equipped but the same might not be the case for the institutions.
- The lockdown makes it worse for those who have technical problems in their devices.
- Parents are finding it difficult to adjust to the online system. The added household work due to the absence of domestic help adds to their problem.
- Most of the subjects like beauty culture, fashion design and tailoring, office management, travel and tourism, web design etc need practical learning so it is difficult to teach them from a distance.

- **Suggestions**

- Online classes offered as live teaching can be sustained only with a mix of activities, worksheets and interactive sessions.
- Teachers should have a structured plan which does not suffocate or burden them and also keep the students involved.
- All institutions will have to chalk out an infrastructure plan which can be used in such a crisis.
- Teachers need to be considerate about how children feel or what they are going through these days so an understanding should be developed.

SWAYAM Prabha

- It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Human Resources Development** to provide **32 High Quality Educational Channels** through DTH across the length and breadth of the country on 24X7 basis.
- It has **curriculum-based course content** covering diverse disciplines.
- This is primarily **aimed** at making **quality learning resources** accessible to remote areas where internet availability is still a challenge.
- The DTH channels are using the **GSAT-15 satellite** for programme telecasts.

Source: TH

Fraud Oversight Wing

Why in News

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** is in the process of putting together an **exclusive wing for banking fraud oversight**.

This wing will have teams for meta-data processing and analysis, artificial intelligence analysis units, as well as proactive risk assessment cells.

Key Points

- **Strength and Participation: The banking fraud oversight wing** may comprise **up to 600 officers** along with experts from the private sector.
- The RBI would hire fresh people, including **industry veterans** to lead the teams.
- **Training:**
 - Experts from the **private sector working** in all these domains will be brought in to train the new members in the fraud oversight wing.
 - These training sessions will be repeated **every year in the initial years**.
 - These new teams will also be given training in the **latest technologies**, so that they can also **prevent another Yes Bank kind of event**.

Background

- The RBI had been mulling ways to proactively detect such frauds after the loan fiasco at **Punjab National Bank**.

The bank fraud to the tune of Rs 11,450 crore involving diamond merchant Nirav Modi. It came to light that the company, in connivance with retired employees of PNB, got at least 150 LoUs, allowing Nirav Modi Group to defraud the bank and many other banks who gave loans to him.
- As part of that plan, the banking regulator in 2019 had moved to create a **separate cadre** of its own employees who would work in **regulation and oversight sections**.
- However, the working conditions were very strict and anyone opting for that cadre **would not be allowed to leave for three years**. To overcome this problem, the RBI sought to create a fraud oversight wing.

Yes Bank Case

- Even though there were representatives of RBI on the Yes Bank board, it was difficult for them to flag the risk for they had never done a credit risk assessment task in their career so far.
- **Steps Taken:**
 - The RBI, on March 5, superseded the board of Yes Bank and placed it under immediate moratorium.
 - Withdrawals from the bank were capped at Rs 50,000.
 - RBI appointed the former State Bank of India (SBI) Chief Financial Officer as the bank's administrator.

- **Reconstruction Plan:**

- RBI had suggested the possibility of SBI, India's largest bank, acquiring a 49% equity stake.
- SBI later committed to invest up to Rs 7,250 crore in Yes bank.

Source: IE

MyGov Corona Helpdesk Chatbot

Why in News

The government's dedicated **WhatsApp chatbot MyGov Corona Helpdesk**, which aims to provide timely updates and help citizens clear their queries on **Covid-19**, has been used by over 2 crore users just in two weeks since its launch.

Key Points

- **About the Chatbot**

- MyGov Corona Helpdesk chatbot has been developed by the **Artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot company Haptik Infotech Pvt Ltd.**
- The chatbot helps **eliminate misinformation & rumours**, which are the primary outlets of panic for millions.
- The MyGov Corona Helpdesk can be used by all **WhatsApp users for free.**

- **Users :**

- According to Haptik, more than **55 million messages have been sent by over 20 million users** since the chatbot was launched by the government on March 20.
- The 'MyGov Corona helpdesk' has **processed over 28 million conversations** on WhatsApp from users across the country while more than **20 million users have taken their queries to the chatbot within the 13 days since its launch.**

- **Queries :**

- The bot caters to a set of **predefined questions.**
- **Frequent Queries:** if a certain query is being asked by users frequently, then the Haptik team analyses those queries and adds them to the scope of the chatbot. Thus, catering to a wider set of questions.
- **Other Queries:** If the chatbot receives a query that is not within the scope of the mentioned questions, it sends an automated response stating that it does not have that information.

- **Language :**

The service was **initially launched in English**, and **Hindi language was added** later to assist the millions of Hindi-speaking users in the country.

Source: TH
