



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

SOCIAL JUSTICE

LEPTOSPIROSIS

Context: There is a seasonal spike in leptospirosis cases during monsoon in India.

What is Leptospirosis disease?

- It is a potentially fatal zoonotic bacterial disease that tends to have large outbreaks after heavy rain or flooding. The disease is more prevalent in warm, humid countries and in both urban and rural areas.
- It affects an estimated 1.03 million people every year, killing around 60,000. Within India, studies have found that leptospirosis is more common in the south, although this could be due to the region's better healthcare and thus better disease detection.
- The disease has been called "ili jwara" in Kannada and "eli pani" in Malayalam, both meaning "rat fever". This usage has fed the common belief that rats are the sole cause of the disease, which is not true.

What causes the disease?

- Leptospirosis is caused by a type of bacteria called 'leptospira'.
- It is a zoonotic disease, which can infect both humans and animals like rats, mice, dogs, cows etc.
- The cycle of disease transmission begins with the shedding of leptospira, usually in the urine of infected animals.
 - According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, infected animals can continue to excrete the bacteria into their surroundings for a few months, but sometimes up to several years.
- When a person walks through this contaminated water or soil, the bacteria can enter the body through open wounds — which may be invisible — or mucous membranes like the eyes or mouth.
- Hence persons working in agricultural fields, in sanitary works or recreational activities in contaminated lakes and rivers are more at risk of getting the infection.

Risk Factors & Determinants

- Leptospirosis has a spectrum of reservoir hosts, including rodents, pigs, cattle, water buffaloes, goats, dogs, horses, and sheep.
- Further, seasonal patterns such as the onset of the monsoon can also

potentially facilitate the disease's incidence and transmission.

- Ambient air that is more humid can help the pathogenic leptospira survive longer in the environment, thus increasing the risk of disease exposure in the community.
- The incidence of the disease is also linked to extreme weather events like floods and hurricanes, when people are exposed to contaminated water.
- Similarly, poor waste management, a high density of stray animals, faulty drainage systems, and unhygienic sanitation facilities are major drivers of the disease in urban areas.
- In rural parts, these are contaminated paddy fields, dirty livestock shelters, and poor water-quality and sanitation.
- Salinity of soil and soil temperature also determines the survival of leptospira for long durations.

Symptoms

- The infection can affect many organs, reflecting the systemic nature of the disease. This is also why the signs and symptoms of leptospirosis are often mistaken for other diseases.
- In milder cases, patients could experience a sudden onset of fever, chills, and headache — or no symptoms at all. But in severe cases, the disease can be characterised by the dysfunction of multiple organs, including the liver, kidneys, lungs, and the brain.

Treatment

- Leptospirosis can successfully be treated with antibiotics like doxycycline, azithromycin, and ceftriaxone.
- The patient should be hydrated at home and in the hospital. Other symptomatic and supportive treatments for fever and pain can also be given based on the doctor's recommendation.

In sum, with 'One Health' in mind, public health professionals must work closely with the animal husbandry department to familiarise people about the dangers of leptospirosis, and create countermeasures that work for the health of both people and animals.

THE IRREVOCABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN ANAEMIA AND MATERNAL HEALTH

Context: A study conducted on anaemic pregnant women of low-and middle-income countries has found that there is a strong link between anaemia and postpartum haemorrhage, with the risk of death or near miss very high.

About the Research Study

- As per the study, by the WOMAN (World Maternal Antifibrinolytic)-2 trial collaborators, worldwide, more than half a billion women of reproductive age are anaemic.
- Lower haemoglobin values had a direct relationship with volume blood loss, and clinical postpartum haemorrhage.
- Anaemia reportedly reduces the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood, and therefore, women with anaemia cannot tolerate the same volume of bleeding as healthy women, and become shocked after a smaller volume blood loss.

What is Anaemia?

- The WHO defines anaemia as a condition where the number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin concentration within them is lower than normal.
- According to WHO, hemoglobin less than 11 gms is called anemia. If it is less than 10 gms it is moderate, if less than 7 gms severe and less than 4 gms is a very severe grade of anemia.
- Hemoglobin is made up of two components haem and globin. Iron, folic acid and vitamin B12 are required for haem production. So, any deficiency of

these will cause anemia.

- Anaemia compromises immunity and impedes cognitive development. Usually severe and very severe anemia only gives symptoms like easy fatigability, dizziness, breathlessness and palpitation.
- Severe anaemia will affect pregnant mother by causing spontaneous abortions, recurrent infections, and preterm labor, high blood loss during labour, shock and it is one of the causes for maternal mortality.

Causes of Anaemia

- Commonest cause is iron deficiency. It is mostly seen in low socio-economic groups. But now, in modern days, we are noticing iron deficiency anemia in high socio-economic groups also.
- Because of improper food habits, choosy eating habits, high consumption of coffee and tea which will hamper iron absorption and also lack of attention towards excessive blood loss during menstruation results in anemia.

Status of Anaemia in India

- Over half of all women and children in India are anaemic, and that number has increased in the last three years. Between 2005 and 2015, anaemia declined in India, albeit marginally.
- But the recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) data shows a reversal of those gains — anaemia rates increased from 53% to 57% in women and 58% to 67% in children in 2019-21.

Reasons for Anaemia in India

- Among women, iron deficiency prevalence is higher than men due to menstrual iron losses and the high iron demands of a growing foetus during pregnancies.
- Cereal-centric diets, with relatively less consumption of iron-rich food groups like millets, meat, fish, eggs, and dark green leafy vegetables (DGLF), can be associated with higher levels of anaemia.
- Dominance of packaged and processed foods which are low in nutrition. High levels of anaemia are also often associated with underlying factors like poor water quality and sanitation conditions that can adversely impact iron absorption in the body.
- Women's empowerment is another factor that can play an important role in determining the quantity and quality of food intake within the household. Finally, the delivery of health and nutritional interventions plays a significant role in the prevalence of anaemia.

Government Efforts for Controlling the Anaemia

- The Anaemia Mukh Bharat (AMB) strategy to reduce prevalence of anaemia

in women, children and adolescents through life cycle approach.

- POSHAN Abhiyaan to achieve improvement in key nutrition parameters for both children and women.
- The 6X6X6 strategy aims to reduce anaemia among six beneficiaries age groups through implementation of six interventions and six institutional mechanisms. E.g., Prophylactic Iron Folic Acid Supplementation to all six beneficiaries age group.
- Testing and Treatment of anemia using digital methods (Digital Invasive Haemoglobinometer) in field settings, Sub Health Centres, Health and Wellness Centres
- Management of severe anaemia in pregnant women by administration of IV Iron Sucrose/ Blood transfusion
- Providing incentives to ASHA for identification and follow-up of high-risk pregnancies including severe anaemia in pregnant women
- National Centre of Excellence and Advanced Research on Anaemia Control (NCEAR-A) at AIIMS, Delhi engaged in capacity building of health care providers and development of training toolkit.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SCO CALLS FOR MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

The formation of a "more representative" and multipolar world order is in the global interest, leaders of the SCO said at a virtual summit

The grouping's decision to induct Iran as its ninth and latest member was one of a number of agreements signed at the summit.

India refused to join other members on paragraphs relating to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the joint statement, and stayed out of a joint statement on SCO Economic Development Strategy 2030,

Mr. Modi also took sharp aim at Pakistan for cross-border terrorism, and at China for connectivity projects that do not respect sovereign boundaries.

New Delhi Declaration

Leaders of the SCO held the meeting of the Council of Heads of State of SCO in the video conference format on 4 July 2023 and adopted New Delhi declaration

GIST

The agreements signed include the New Delhi Declaration, outlining areas of cooperation between SCO countries;

a joint statement on countering radicalisation; one on digital transformation, where India offered to share expertise on digital payment interfaces.

In a reference to sanctions on Russia and Iran, SCO members jointly criticised non-UN sanctions as "incompatible with the principles of international law", which have a "negative impact" on other countries.

SCO members also agreed to explore the use of "national currencies" for payments within the grouping, which would circumvent international dollar-based payments.

The declaration noted that only "interested member states" signed the economic strategy statement, while leaving India out of the paragraphs supporting China's BRI. India opposes the BRI over its inclusion of projects in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Better connectivity not only enhances mutual trade but also fosters mutual trust. However, in these efforts, it is essential to uphold the basic principles of the SCO charter, particularly respecting the sovereignty and regional integrity of the Member States.

SCO is not directed against other states and international organizations and is open to broad cooperation with them in accordance with the goals and principles of the UN Charter.

To address the problems of international and regional development, countering traditional and non-traditional security challenges and threats.

Relevance of initiatives to promote cooperation in building of a new-type international relations in the spirit of mutual respect, justice, equality and mutually beneficial cooperation, as well as formation of a common vision of the idea of creating a community of the common destiny of humanity.

Commitment to peaceful settlement of disagreements and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultations.

Strong commitment to fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism, the Member States are determined to continue taking active measures to eliminate the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

Inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of states under the pretext of countering terrorism and extremism, as well as unacceptability of using terrorist, extremist and radical groups for mercenary goals.

Effective activities of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in promoting cooperation between competent authorities in countering terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Oppose militarization of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Expressed their concern about the growing threats posed by increased production, trafficking and abuse of narcotic drugs and using the proceeds of illicit drug-trafficking as a source of funding for terrorism.

Importance of the Convention on Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BTWC) as one of pillars of the global security architecture.

Early entry into force of the Protocol on Security Assurances to the Agreement on a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia for all signatories.

Support for Afghanistan

The Member States consider it essential to establish an inclusive government in Afghanistan with the participation of representatives of all ethnic, religious and political groups in Afghan society.

Stressing the importance of long-term hospitality and effective assistance provided to the Afghan refugees by regional and neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, the Member States consider important, the active efforts of the international community to facilitate their dignified, safe and sustainable return to their homeland.

In view of the evolving humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the Member States supported continued efforts to assist the Afghan people.

Faith in International Organisation

Affirm the significance for further improving and reforming the architecture of global economic governance and will consistently advocate and strengthen an open, transparent, fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system based on the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles and rules.

They stressed that unilateral application of economic sanctions other than those approved by the UN Security Council are incompatible with the principles of international law and have a negative impact on the third countries and international economic relations.

India not a part of BRI

They consider it important to ensure the implementation of the SCO Economic Development Strategy 2030 adopted by interested Member States. Reaffirming their support for China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) initiative, the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Russian Federation, Republic of Tajikistan and Republic of Uzbekistan note the ongoing work to jointly implement this project, including efforts to link the construction of the Eurasian Economic Union and BRI.

National Currency for trade

Implementing the Roadmap for gradual increase in the share of national currencies in mutual settlements by the interested Member States.

Cooperation in education, science and technology, culture, health, disaster management, as well as tourism, sports and people-to-people contacts, especially through women and youth, public diplomacy institutions, cultural centres and the media.

2024 - SCO Year of Environment

Cooperation in the field of environmental protection, ecological security and prevention of the negative consequences of climate change, development of specially protected nature reserves and eco-tourism, agreed to declare 2024 as the SCO Year of Environment.

The presidency of the SCO for the forthcoming period is handed over to the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The next meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of State will be held in 2024 in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

INDIA LODGES PROTEST WITH CANADA OVER KHALISTAN POSTERS

Context: The Ministry of External Affairs summoned the High Commissioner of Canada, Cameron MacKay, and lodged a protest after campaigners for Khalistan put out posters targeting Indian diplomats in Canada.

The Details of the News

- The incident regarding the controversial posters came less than a month after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar cautioned Canada about the risk of Khalistani extremism.
- The posters called upon pro-Khalistan sympathisers to assemble in Toronto on July 8 in protest against the killing of a leading campaigner for Khalistan, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.
- The posters spread across the world via the Internet, urged sympathisers to take out similar marches towards Indian missions in other major western cities on July 8. All such posters carried photographs of Indian diplomats in Canada, the U.S. and Australia.
- An attempt was made to set fire to the Indian mission in San Francisco on Monday.

Khalistan and Canada

- Canada has for long been considered a safe haven for Khalistan supporters. The growing political and economic power of Indian Sikh diaspora is the reason for this.
 - As per the 2021 Canadian census, Sikhs account for 2.1 per cent of Canada's population, and are the country's fastest growing religious group. After India, Canada is home to the largest population of Sikhs in the world.
 - Today, Sikhs lawmakers and officials serve at all levels of Canada's government, and their burgeoning population is one of the most important political constituencies in the country.
 - In 2017, Jagmeet Singh became the first Sikh leader of a major Canadian

political party when he took the reins of the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP).

- However, not all Canadian Sikhs are Khalistan supporters, and for most in the Sikh diaspora, Khalistan is not a "hot" issue.

What is the Khalistan movement?

The word Khalistan originates from two Punjabi words: Khalis and stan. Khalis means pure, and stan means land or place. Khalistan means pure land or the land of the pure.

- The Khalistan movement is a fight for a separate, sovereign Sikh state in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).
- It started during the 1970s when a section of Akalis began to demand political autonomy for the region. In 1973, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution also asserted regional autonomy.
- The Khalistan movement officially began on April 12, 1980 through the establishment of Council of Khalistan at Anandpur Sahib. Jagjit Singh Chauhan became the president of the organization.
- Over the years, it has survived in various forms, in various places and amongst different populations.
- The movement was crushed in India following Operation Blue Star (1984) and Operation Black Thunder (1986 and 1988), but it continues to evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population, especially in the Sikh diaspora in countries such as Canada, the UK, and Australia.

Conclusion

As per the experts, today the Khalistan movement is not about popular support. It is about geo-politics. Countries like China and Pakistan can well tolerate, subsidise and assist in various ways the Khalistan movement on the basis that it is making trouble for their enemies in India.

ECONOMICS

GST - AN INCOMPLETE REFORM

GIST *Despite gains, the indirect tax regime is yet to become truly simple or efficient*

India's tryst with the Goods and Services Tax (GST), launched at a special midnight Parliament session with unusual fanfare, completed six years this month.

GST is an indirect tax which has replaced many indirect taxes in India such as the excise duty, VAT, services tax, etc. The Goods and Service Tax Act was passed in the Parliament on 29th March 2017 and came into effect on 1st July 2017.

GST is levied on the supply of goods and services. Goods and Services Tax Law in India is a comprehensive, multi-stage, destination-based tax that is levied on every value addition. GST is a single domestic indirect tax law for the entire country.

Marking the occasion, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasised that the GST has moved the country towards a unified market from a situation where each State mandated different indirect tax structures and procedures, while inter-State borders were marked by bottlenecked check posts that added to logistics costs and subtracted from Indian goods' competitiveness. Introduced soon after the demonetisation shock, the GST was viewed as another disruptor for the informal economy and its initial technical, structural and procedural challenges took a while to sort out.

That all businesses with annual turnover of ₹5 crore will have to generate e-invoices starting this August, and that there has been no ostensible pushback from smaller businesses over this, indicates that firms have gradually embraced the change.

The Revenue Department's crackdown on fake invoicing and other techniques deployed by tax evaders may compel the few outliers to fall in line too.

Tightening compliance and the post-pandemic rebound in economic activity have helped improve revenues from the GST, which Ms. Sitharaman had suggested were underwhelming as of late 2021 when the Council set up a ministerial group to rationalise the unwieldy multiple rate structure and enhance tax inflows.

This June, GST revenues crossed ₹1.6 lakh crore, only the fourth such occasion in its 72 months' existence, lifting the average collections in the first quarter of this year to nearly ₹1.7 lakh crore — a healthy 12% over last year's kitty.

The recent revenue buoyancy, even if it may face a blip if consumption growth falters amid a slowing global economy, bodes well for States that were worried about their fiscal capacity after five years of assured revenues through GST compensation expired last July.

Not so Good & Simple Tax

For taxpayers and consumers, however, much remains to be done till the GST can be considered a Good, Simple Tax.

GST Compensation cess levies have been extended till at least March 2026, instead of the initial five-year tenure, due to the transitory shock of COVID-19 lockdowns on revenues.

Dispute resolution remains a pain point for industry, with GST appellate tribunals still not set up.

There is no road map in sight on the rate rationalisation exercise or the inclusion of excluded items such as electricity, petroleum and real estate, without which the efficiency gains from the GST remain constricted.

The GST Council needs to meet more often and turn its to-do list into a must-do list expeditiously.

A MACRO VIEW OF THE FISCAL HEALTH OF STATES

In India, the States mobilise altogether more than a third of total revenue, spend 60% of combined government expenditure, and have a share in government borrowing that is around 40%.

At the Union level, the fiscal deficit declined from 9.1% of GDP in 2020-21 to 5.9% in 2023-24 (BE). All State fiscal deficit declined from 4.1 % of GDP in 2020-21 to 3.24 % of GDP in 2022-23 (RE). For the major States, for the year 2023-24 (BE), it is expected to be 2.9% of GDP.

Fiscal consolidation at State levels:

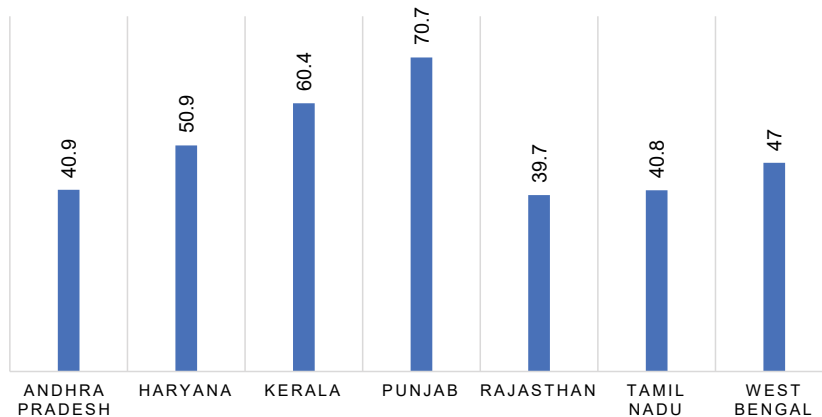
- States in aggregate managed to be fiscally prudent despite a significant contraction in revenues even during the peak of COVID-19. States were able to reprioritise expenditure and quickly contain the fiscal deficit.
- Reduction in fiscal deficit is a combination of expenditure-side adjustments, improved Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection and higher tax devolution due to buoyant central revenues.
- Non-GST revenues are also showing signs of recovery after the pandemic in most States.

Fiscal challenges

As in 2023-24 (BE), out of 17 major States, 13 States have deficit in the revenue account. Out of 13 States, fiscal deficits in seven States are primarily driven by revenue deficits; the States being Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. They also have large debt to GSDP ratios.

For these seven States, their specific shares of revenue deficit in fiscal deficit for 2023-24 are: Andhra Pradesh (40.9%), Haryana (50.9%), Kerala (60.4%), Punjab (70.7%), Rajasthan (39.7%), Tamil Nadu (40.8%), and West Bengal (47%). The all-State share of revenue deficit in fiscal deficit for the same year is expected to be 27%.

SHARE OF REVENUE DEFICIT IN FISCAL DEFICIT FOR 2023-24



An assessment of successive Finance Commissions since the Twelfth Finance Commission identified three States, i.e., Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal, as fiscally stressed States. The number of States that are now fiscally stressed has increased to seven (measured in terms of the level of revenue deficit).

The combined fiscal deficit of these States is 3.71% of GSDP when the all-State average for the same is 2.9 %; their combined revenue deficit is 2.15 % of GSDP, when the all-State revenue deficit is 0.78 %; their combined debt ratio is higher than the Finance Commission recommended debt ratio for all States for the year 2023-24. These States together contribute around 40% to India's GDP.

GOVERNANCE

FREEDOM OF SPEECH - THWARTING TWITTER

It is unfortunate that the petition by Twitter, Inc. challenging the validity of the spate of blocking orders passed by the Union government was rejected by the Karnataka High Court.

While success in litigation involving the government's power to restrict speech and expression on grounds permitted in Article 19(2) of the Constitution was always expected to be difficult,

It is disconcerting that the court refused to countenance all arguments based on the absence of notice to users and the apparent lack of proportionality involved in large-scale suspension of accounts and posts that contained political content, especially dissenting views against the government's farm laws and the farmers' protests they sparked.

The freedoms of speech, assembly, formation of unions, free movement and residence across India as outlined in Article 19(1) are subject to restrictions set by the Government under Article 19(2). 'Reasonable restrictions' as outlined in Article 19(2) of the Constitution allows for restrictions in the interests of the security and sovereignty of India, friendly relations with Foreign States, public order, decency or morality in the relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence.

There was some expectation that judicial review will temper the authorities' zeal to go in for account-level blocking rather than ordering the removal of specific tweets, links or URLs that it deemed injurious to public order or national security.

What is quite disappointing is that the court both ruled that Twitter cannot espouse the cause of its users who have voiced no grievance and discouraged an intervenor from among those who suffered account-level suspension.

It ruled that a foreign entity such as Twitter could not invoke the constitutional guarantee of free speech and expression on behalf of users.

In the ultimate rebuff to the platform, the court imposed costs of ₹50 lakh for indulging in much-delayed "speculative litigation" despite not complying with the blocking orders for a long period and then doing so only under protest.

Judiciary on IT Act

Section 69A of the IT Act, which sets out the power to issue blocking orders, was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal* (2015) mainly on the ground that it came with adequate procedural safeguards.

Twitter argued that lack of notice to the originators of content and the account users was in breach of that verdict.

The court has ruled that issuing notice to users was not mandatory, especially when they may not be identifiable.

Conclusions such as this, and the wide berth given to authorities to opt for account-level blocking may require reconsideration.

A definitive verdict from the Supreme Court may be needed to clarify both the rights and obligations of large media companies in relation to user-generated content.



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