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1. Tamil Nadu Assembly Election – Vijay's TVK Emerges as Largest Party

- Actor Vijay's party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which contested independently in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, has won 108 seats and emerged as the single largest party.

(i) Despite not being part of the traditional Dravidian political lineage, TVK achieved a historic victory by defeating the strong alliances of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

(ii) A total of 118 seats are required to secure a majority.

- Although TVK won 108 seats on its own, it falls short of the 118 needed to form a majority Government.

(iii) Decision Lies with the Governor

- Since no party has a clear majority, the decision on whom to invite to form the Government lies with the Tamil Nadu Governor, R. V. Arlekar.
- The Governor has two options:
    1. Invite the single largest party (TVK) to prove majority on the Assembly floor.
    2. Invite a post-poll alliance that claims majority support.
- Political observers note that since the Governor is currently in Kerala overseeing Government formation there, TVK has time to gather support.

2. Hantavirus Outbreak on Cruise Ship

- A viral outbreak of Hantavirus on a luxury cruise ship from the Netherlands has resulted in the deaths of three passengers, while three others are in critical condition.

(i) Two of the deceased were a Dutch couple; details about the third are being collected.

(ii) The virus was detected on the ship MV Hondius, carrying 150 passengers from Argentina via Antarctica toward Cape Verde.

(iii) The World Health Organization confirmed the infection through laboratory tests.

- The virus spreads through air contaminated by rodent droppings, urine, or saliva.

(iv) Symptoms begin mildly (fever, muscle pain) but can escalate to severe respiratory failure.

- Medical experts warn that the fatality rate can be as high as 40%.

(v) The ship is currently anchored near Cape Verde, and authorities have denied passengers permission to disembark while health monitoring continues.

3. Volcanic Activity in the Philippines

(i) The famous Mayon Volcano in the Philippines released large amounts of volcanic ash over the weekend.

- A sudden collapse of accumulated volcanic deposits on the southwest slope caused dense ash clouds to cover 87 nearby villages.

4. Launch of Electronic Gold Receipts (EGR)

The National Stock Exchange of India has introduced a new investment method called Electronic Gold Receipts (EGR) to simplify online gold trading.

(i) EGR is a paperless investment system:

- Gold purchased by investors is stored digitally in their accounts.
- Equivalent physical gold is securely stored in SEBI-certified vaults.

(ii) As a pilot, a 1 kg gold bar was successfully converted into a digital receipt for trading.

(iii) Approved by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, this system:

- Ensures transparency and security
- Bridges traditional gold markets with financial markets

5. Formula One – Miami Grand Prix

At the Miami Grand Prix, the fourth race of the season, Italian driver Kimi Antonelli from Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula One Team secured victory.

- This marks his third consecutive win (a hat-trick), following victories in the Chinese and Japanese Grand Prix.

6. Decline of Left Parties in India – No State Under Left Rule

Following the defeat of the Left Democratic Front led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Kerala, a significant political shift has occurred.

- For the first time since 1977, there is now no state in India governed by Left parties in the past 50 years.

(i) Left parties once held strong administrative power in several states and had notable influence in national politics.

- In recent years, Kerala was the only state under Left rule.
- With their defeat there, a major transformation in the political standing of Left parties has taken place.

(ii) Historically:

- In West Bengal, the Left Front ruled for 34 years before losing power in 2011.
- In Tripura, Left parties lost power in 2018.

(iii) Since 2016, Left rule continued only in Kerala.

- Now, with their defeat there as well, Left parties are no longer in power in any Indian state.

(iv) Kerala holds a unique place in political history:

- In 1957, under E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the state formed the world's first democratically elected communist Government.

(v) At one time, Left parties had strong national influence:

- After independence, the Communist Party of India emerged as the largest opposition party in Parliament.

(vi) During the 1990s and early 2000s:

- Left parties held a significant presence in the Lok Sabha.
- They played a key role in coalition politics at the national level.

(vii) Their peak came in 2004:

- Left parties won 61 Lok Sabha seats.
- They provided outside support to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.
- They influenced major policy decisions during that period.

7. Analysis of India's shift toward ethanol-blended petrol

(i) The primary goal of blending ethanol with petrol is to reduce India's heavy dependence on crude oil imports and decrease air pollution.

(ii) Advantages of Ethanol Blending:

- At a 20% blending rate, India can reduce crude oil imports by approximately 10 million tons, saving $8 to $10 billion in foreign exchange annually.
- Ethanol-blended fuel burns cleaner, resulting in lower carbon emissions and reduced air pollution from vehicles.
- It bolsters the rural economy by providing farmers and sugar mill workers with a more stable income through sugarcane and alternative crops.
- It reduces the financial burden on the Government by lowering the subsidies required for sugar production.

(iii) Problems of Water Usage:

- Sugarcane is a water-guzzling crop. Producing one liter of ethanol requires between 3,000 to 5,000 liters of water, including the water needed for cultivation.
- Massive Requirements: To meet the 20% blending goal, India needs about 2,200 crore liters of ethanol annually. This translates to a staggering 3,000 to 5,000 TMC of water required solely for this purpose.
- Comparison to River Flow: For context, the entire annual water production of the Cauvery river is only 740 TMC; the ethanol requirement far exceeds this.
- Groundwater Depletion: States like Maharashtra and Karnataka have seen a 20-35% increase in sugarcane cultivation land, leading to severe depletion of groundwater levels.
- Inter-state Impact: Increased water usage for sugarcane in upstream states like Karnataka could significantly reduce the water flow to downstream states like Tamil Nadu.

(iv) Steps Taken by the Government:

- The policy to blend ethanol was first officially announced in 2003, initially targeting a 5% blend in specific states.
- The initiative gained significant momentum after 2014, with the Government setting a firm target to achieve 20% ethanol blending (E20) nationwide by 2025–26.
- India has already progressed from initial stages to achieving a 10% to 15% blending rate.
- To mitigate the pressure on sugarcane, the Government is encouraging the production of ethanol from other sources like corn and damaged rice.

(v) Suggestions for the Future:

- There is a need for a National Agricultural Policy that aligns crop choices with regional water availability.
- Government must prioritize river interlinking and improving water storage infrastructure, noting that currently, only 10% of India's rainfall is stored while 30,000 TMC flows wasted into the sea.

8. Environmental and economic impact of the school uniform industry

- Producing just one kilogram of polyester (commonly used for uniforms) requires 62 liters of water, 153 kilograms of petroleum, and 217 megajoules of energy.
- Carbon Footprint: The production process for 1kg of polyester releases 21 kilograms of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.
- Massive Waste Generation: India has approximately 24.6 crore school-going children. If each child discards just one shirt annually, it results in 31,980 tons of textile waste clogging landfills.
- Resource Depletion: The current "take-make-dispose" linear model rapidly depletes natural resources while increasing environmental pollution.

(i) Ways to Recycle and Reuse Uniforms:

- Establishing "Uniform Banks" to collect used uniforms in good condition and distribute them to students in need.
- Adopting innovative designs like the "Style Her Empowered" (S.H.E.) model, where uniforms are designed to "grow with the child," extending their usable life.
- Shifting to a circular economy where clothes are designed for durability and are eventually recycled back into the production cycle.
- Utilizing online platforms (like "Kitkit") for parents to buy, sell, or exchange used educational materials and uniforms.

(ii)Consequences of the Current System:

- Financial Burden on Parents: Schools frequently change colors, designs, or logos, forcing parents to purchase new sets every year even if the old ones still fit.
- Market Exploitation: The school uniform market is a massive profit-driven industry, valued at ₹1.76 lakh crore in 2024 and expected to reach ₹3.07 lakh crore by 2034.
- Environmental Degradation: Constant discarded clothing contributes significantly to global pollution and the waste crisis.

(iii) Recycling of School Uniforms Worldwide:

- Africa: The S.H.E. project creates adjustable uniforms that last longer as children grow.
- United Kingdom: Many schools follow a tradition where seniors pass down their uniforms to juniors. "Apparelled Uniforms" and other banks facilitate the distribution of quality used clothing.
- United States: Some schools have moved away from mandatory specific uniforms, opting for general color-based dress codes to allow parents to buy affordable, reusable clothing from any source.
- Finland: Known for one of the world's best education systems, students in Finland do not wear uniforms at all, eliminating this waste entirely.

(iv) Steps and Recommendations for the Government:

- The Government has maintained the uniform system since independence to foster equality and discipline among students.
- The Central and State Governments should collaborate with private schools to standardize colors and designs. This would allow uniforms to be exchanged between students of different schools, significantly reducing waste.
- Instead of unique fabric designs, school identity can be maintained through school-specific neckties or ID cards.
- While recycling technology exists, India lacks sufficient infrastructure; currently, major textile recycling is concentrated only in Tiruppur and Panipat. The Government needs to expand this infrastructure nationwide.