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1. Prime Minister Modi's Visit to Seychelles and Climate Change Address

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing the Parliament of Seychelles, stated that countries of the Global South, especially island nations, have been severely affected by climate change.

(i) He emphasized that climate action measures guided by integrity, accountability, and equity are essential.

(ii) Prime Minister Modi arrived in Seychelles, India's maritime neighbour, on a three-day state visit. He addressed the Parliament of Seychelles in the capital city, Victoria. Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Parliament of Seychelles. Highlights of his speech are as follows:

- The effects of climate change are already visible in coastlines, marine ecosystems, weather patterns, and communities.
- Countries of the Global South, particularly island nations that have contributed the least to climate change, are bearing the greatest burden of its consequences. This is unjust.
- Therefore, climate solutions must be guided by integrity, responsibility, and equality. This is the essence of climate justice.

(iii) The Government of Seychelles conferred upon Prime Minister Modi the newly instituted "Guardian of the Blue Horizon" award, established to honour global leaders contributing to the protection of marine ecosystems, climate resilience, and the sustainable development of the blue economy.

- The award was presented in recognition of Prime Minister Modi's commitment to environmental protection and his efforts to advance the aspirations of developing small island nations.
- Modi is the first leader to receive this highest honour of Seychelles. It is also the 34th international honour received by him.
- Expressing gratitude to the people and Government of Seychelles, Prime Minister Modi dedicated the award to countries fighting climate-related challenges.
- In a post on X, Modi stated that India is prepared to undertake every effort necessary to make the planet greener and more sustainable. He noted that this commitment is reflected in India's domestic initiatives such as the LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) movement, as well as international initiatives including the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

(iv) Prime Minister Modi held bilateral talks with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie. The two leaders discussed strengthening bilateral relations and regional and international issues of mutual interest.

- President Patrick announced that discussions had commenced on implementing India's announced special economic assistance package of US\$175 million (approximately ₹1,651 crore) for Seychelles.
- A total of 19 agreements and major decisions were concluded to enhance cooperation in defence, maritime security, digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture, and education.
- These included agreements relating to loan implementation frameworks, extradition procedures, UPI transactions in Seychelles, and the establishment of Jan Aushadhi pharmacies.

(v) India's Assistance to Seychelles

During the visit, India gifted Seychelles the following:

- An Indian-made fast patrol vessel,
- Six ambulances,
- Ten vehicles,
- 500 metric tonnes of rice, and
- 8,500 metric tonnes of cement.

2. GST Completes 10 Years; Government Focuses on AI-Driven Reforms

As the Goods and Services Tax (GST) completes ten years on 1 July, the Central Government is taking steps to improve its efficiency through Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies.

(i) GST was launched at midnight on 1 July 2017 in the Central Hall of the old Parliament building by then President Pranab Mukherjee. At the launch, Prime Minister Modi stated that GST would put an end to harassment faced by traders and small businesses.

(ii) Achieving political consensus for this tax reform was one of the biggest challenges. Then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley played a crucial role by conducting extensive consultations and securing the cooperation of states and political stakeholders.

- GST was initially introduced with four tax slabs: 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%.
- In September last year, it was restructured to retain only two slabs: 5% and 18%.

(iii) It was decided that luxury goods alone would attract a 40% tax rate. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated that this reform would leave more money in the hands of the public.

(iv) During the financial year 2017–18, when GST was introduced, the average monthly GST collection was ₹89,700 crore. This increased to ₹1.85 lakh crore in the previous financial year.

- The number of registered taxpayers at the time of GST's introduction was 66.5 lakh.
- This figure increased to around 1.6 crore last year.

(v) What is the Next Step?

- As GST enters its tenth year on 1 July, the Central Government has shifted its focus from implementation to improving efficiency.
- The Government aims to strengthen GST through the use of artificial intelligence, enhanced data sharing, and faster refund processing systems.
- The Government is also increasing the use of technology to simplify tax compliance, especially for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- By integrating data from GST, income tax, and customs departments, the Government seeks to improve risk assessment mechanisms and prevent tax evasion.

3. Proposed Amendments to Medical Device Rules, 2017

The Union Ministry of Health has proposed amendments to the Medical Device Rules, 2017, to reduce the time required for granting manufacturing licences for medical devices.

(i) According to the Ministry's statement, draft amendments have been published in the Official Gazette with the objective of simplifying and expediting the licensing process while ensuring quality, safety, and performance standards.

(ii) Under the Medical Device Rules, 2017, medical devices are classified into four categories based on risk:

Class A, B, C, and D. Statutory timelines have been prescribed for processing applications for manufacturing licences in each category.

(iii) Class B devices include:

- Blood pressure monitoring instruments,
- Pulse oximeters, and
- Hypodermic needles.

The proposed amendment seeks to reduce the licensing period for Class B medical devices from 140 days to 115 days.

(iv) Classes C and D include devices such as:

- Cardiac stents,
- Hip and knee implants, and
- Other orthopaedic implants.

For these categories, the proposed amendment seeks to reduce the licensing period from 105 days to 90 days.

4. India's Humanitarian Assistance to Venezuela

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced that the relief materials sent by India to earthquake-affected Venezuela have reached the country.

(i) Under "Operation Amistad," the Indian Air Force deployed two C-17 aircraft carrying:

- 35 tonnes of relief materials, including medicines and medical equipment, and a 41-member rescue and relief team.

5. Thenpennaiyar river's significance and the ongoing legal struggle for a water-sharing tribunal.

(i) Geographical Facts

- The Thenpennai river originates in the Nandi Hills of the Chikkaballapur district in Karnataka.
- It flows for 93 km within Karnataka, supporting Bengaluru's groundwater and lakes, before entering Tamil Nadu and traveling a total of 497 km to reach the Bay of Bengal.
- Approximately 77% of the river's catchment area lies within Tamil Nadu.
- It is the second-longest river in Tamil Nadu after the Cauvery. In Tamil Nadu, it flows through the districts of Krishnagiri, Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai, Kallakurichi, Villupuram, and Cuddalore.
- The river carries an annual volume of 62 TMC (Thousand Million Cubic feet); however, Tamil Nadu currently receives an average of only 3.5 TMC from Karnataka.

(ii) Historical Context and Origins of Dispute

- The sharing of the river's water is historically governed by the interstate agreements of 1892 and 1933.
- While the Cauvery dispute is a century old, the Thenpennaiyar conflict intensified after 2016 when Karnataka began constructing new structures across the river's tributaries.
- Karnataka constructed a reservoir with a capacity of 0.5 TMC across the Markandeya river (a tributary of the Thenpennaiyar) in the Kolar district.
- Tamil Nadu contends that Karnataka's unilateral construction violates the historical agreements and severely impacts the irrigation interests of Tamil Nadu's downstream farmers.

(iii) Karnataka's Stance

- Karnataka argues that the Markandeya dam was built solely for drinking water purposes, which they claim should take precedence over irrigation.
- Karnataka further asserted in court that they did not require special permission for the project because 75% of the work had already been completed by the time the dispute was raised.

(iv) Legal Timeline and Delays

- Seeking a permanent solution, Tamil Nadu filed a case in 2018 requesting the Central Government to form a dedicated water dispute tribunal.
- In 2019, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Government to establish the tribunal.
- Mediation committee meetings held in 2024 failed to produce a consensus between the two states.
- The Supreme Court subsequently set a deadline for the Center to notify the tribunal in the official Gazette by March 3, 2024.
- Although a draft proposal for the tribunal was prepared in 2023, it has yet to receive final approval from the Union Cabinet.

(v) Conclusion: The Farmers' Perspective

- The continued delay in forming the tribunal (now seven years since the initial request) is viewed as a significant threat to the livelihoods of thousands of farmers in northern Tamil Nadu.
- Farmers are waiting in anticipation for the immediate formation of the tribunal, as they believe it is the only way to secure their rightful share of water and prevent further unilateral dam construction by Karnataka.

6. Intensifying global climate crisis, the disruption of the Earth's heat balance, and the resulting threats to the environment and human health.

(i) The Science of Earth's Heat Balance

- Heat is an inescapable part of human life; it was the discovery of fire that allowed humanity to transition into a civilized world.
- Scientific principles define Earth's "heat budget" as the balance between incoming solar radiation and the heat energy radiated back from Earth into space.
- Recent studies show a significant disruption in this balance, with global surface temperatures rising to levels never seen before.
- Data from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) indicates that the period from 2015 to 2025 was the hottest decade on record.
- The year 2025 was the second or third hottest year ever recorded, with average temperatures 1.43°C higher than the 1850–1900 average.

(ii) Geographical Facts: Melting Ice and Rising Seas

- The Arctic ice cover is melting at an alarming rate. Compared to 1979 data, the Arctic ice area has shrunk to 14.19 million square kilometers as of 2025.
- Global average sea levels have risen by 11 cm in 2014 when compared to 1993 levels.
- Rising sea levels are causing severe coastal erosion and the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater sources. Within a few decades, Chennai and its suburbs could face a total lack of potable groundwater due to this salinity.

(iii) Ocean Acidification and Ecosystem Collapse

- Rising temperatures are severely impacting deep-sea ecosystems.
- Between 2015 and 2024, human activities accounted for 29% of the increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, much of which is absorbed by the oceans.
- This absorption increases the acidity of the oceans (ocean acidification), which alters the marine environment and threatens the survival of marine life.

(iv) Scientific Impact on Health and Economy

- Climate change is a direct driver of increased natural disasters, including sudden floods and intense cyclones.
- Rising temperatures create conditions for the spread of waterborne diseases and mosquito-borne illnesses, such as Dengue, which the World Health Organization notes is increasing globally.
- Unpredictable rainfall patterns—either failing entirely or arriving prematurely—severely damage agriculture, which in turn destabilizes the national economy.
- Globally, 1.2 billion people are now impacted by heat stress, which reduces the productivity and health of workers in both the agricultural and industrial sectors.

(v) Conclusion: A Call to Action

- UN Secretary-General António Guterres has warned that the Earth is in a state of "climate emergency" as it has crossed several safety boundaries.
- Humanity must commit to noble actions to protect the Earth, asserting that the only way to "quench the Earth's thirst" and ensure survival is to live in a way that respects and restores the planet.