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### 1. The risk of international spread of wild type-1 polio cases from Pakistan is great

#### Why in News?

The ambitious goal of eradicating wild-type poliovirus type-1 (WPV1) by 2026 appears to have become tougher. WPV1, which is endemic only in Pakistan and Afghanistan, is showing signs of a resurgence since 2023.

## Wild polio eradicated in Africa

### Countries with polio cases in the past 12 months

■ Vaccine-derived poliovirus

■ Wild poliovirus



\*Afghanistan and Pakistan also have cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus

#### Possible increase in cases

With Afghanistan and Pakistan reporting six WPV1 cases each in 2023 — there were two cases in Afghanistan and 20 cases in Pakistan in 2022 — the total incidence of type-1 cases in both countries in 2023 might appear to have nearly halved. But with six cases in Afghanistan and five cases in Pakistan already this year, there appears to be an uptick. If this continues, the total

cases being reported from the two countries might be close to or even surpass the 2022 numbers.

### **Rising virus in environment**

The concern about WPV1 is not limited to the number of cases in children. The circulation of the virus in the environment is seen to be rising, and, most importantly, after a gap of two years, positive environmental samples have been increasingly collected in Pakistan, in 2023 and till early June this year, from cities which have been historical reservoirs for the virus. Last year, 125 positive environmental samples were collected from 28 districts in Pakistan. Of these, 119 belonged to a genetic cluster (YB3A), which suggests that these were imported from Afghanistan. By June 1 this year, there have been 153 positive environmental samples from 39 districts. As of April 8, 2024, 34 positive environmental samples were collected from Afghanistan.

### **WHO view**

According to the World Health Organization, the presence of positive environmental samples in "epidemiologically critical areas and historical reservoirs" such as Karachi, Quetta and the Peshawar-Khyber blocks in Pakistan, and Kandahar in Afghanistan, represents a significant risk to the gains made in the past.

Rising positive environmental samples are a reflection of polio campaigns not really achieving their desired coverage; fake finger marking sans vaccination is a persisting problem. Though children in Pakistan's cities are largely immunised, there is a heightened risk of the virus striking any unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated children — in 2023, two of the six cases were from Karachi city. The situation in Pakistan appears worse than it is in Afghanistan with the actual spread of WPV1 seen "predominantly in Afghanistan in 2022 now being detected in Pakistan in 2023 and 2024".

### **Risk of international Spread**

There is also the grave risk of international spread from Pakistan, particularly to Afghanistan. With over 0.5 million Afghan refugees forced to leave Pakistan, and an estimated 0.8 million to be evicted soon, there is an increased risk of cross-border spread of the virus. There is a large pool of unvaccinated and under-immunised children in southern Afghanistan, increasing the risk that returning refugees can pose.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu

## **2. The lack of leadership at TISS**

### **Why in News?**

Over a 100 staff members of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) were in for a shock, after they received termination letters on June 28, and were asked to not report to work come July. Within two days of this development, they were told that the termination letters had been withdrawn and that they could continue working as the Tata Education Trust (TET), which funds their salaries, had now assured to make funds available to support their salaries.

### What happened?

A month before the termination letters, up to 55 teachers and 60 non-teaching staff had an inkling that their jobs could be in trouble, because even as the academic year of 2023-24 was winding up in April, there was no clarity from TET on the renewal of funding of their contractual positions. "Some of these staff has been working with TISS for up to fifteen years. TISS is largely funded by the University Grants Commission, but staff salaries, certain courses and funds for maintenance are funded by the TET.



### TISS withdraws 'mass termination' notice: 'Tata trust to release funds'

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has retracted its notice to terminate contracts of over 55 teaching and 60 non-teaching staff after facing strong criticism from faculty and student body.

### What has been happening at TISS?

From 2004 onwards, TISS had widened its scope of work, and from close to 15 programmes including Masters' and Diplomas, it expanded its offering to over 55 programmes including dual degrees and foreign university collaborations.

Under the directorship of late Prof. S. Parsuraman, TISS was flourishing, with students undertaking enormous field work under the research guidance of teachers.

Mr. Parsuraman was the longest serving director of TISS from 2004 to 2018. However, trouble started brewing in TISS from 2016 onwards, when it decided to stop student aid to those belonging to marginalised

communities in all of its four campuses in Mumbai, Tuljapur, Hyderabad and Guwahati.

After Mr. Parsuraman's tenure, Prof. Shalini Bharath, a public health researcher who has extensively worked on HIV access issues served as a director for five years.

In 2023, the UGC regulations were changed, which brought appointments in TISS under the central government's purview, as over 50% of its funding is from the Centre.

After Prof. Bharath retired, the director of Indian Institute of Management (Mumbai) Manoj Tiwari, took up the additional charge of an acting director as well as Vice Chancellor, until a full time director is appointed. He was supposed to have interim charge for six months, but his term was extended by another six months after delays were faced in appointing a Director.

### How has a lack of leadership affected the institute?

After the tweak of the UGC regulations, administrative bodies of TISS were also supposed to undergo an overhaul. Sources at TISS say that in a classic case of 'mismanagement,' these bodies have not yet been made fully operational.

After the central government took over the TISS administration, the erstwhile 'Governing Board,' the highest decision making body of the institute, earlier headed by a nominee of the Tata Group, S. Ramadorai who was also CEO of Tata Consultancy Services, and included two to three faculty members as well as an equal number of external members, stood dissolved.

The government decided that this would be replaced by an 'Executive Council,' headed by the VC. "It has been over nine months, but the new council is yet to come into full operation.

### **How has this affected students?**

After the executive council, the academic council is the second-most important body in TISS. The academic council is vital to all semester activities in the institute. What is disheartening is that the academic council is yet to convene to approve results for major programmes including Masters, PhD, Diplomas and Certificate courses, thus leaving the students in a lurch.

While the students were supposed to receive their results in May, this has now been delayed by three months, and their convocation has been pushed to August. The delay has affected the future of over thousand students who graduate out of TISS every year, and it affects their future plans of studying abroad or pursuing careers as they have not been awarded their degrees.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance  
Source: The Hindu

## **3. The Telecommunications Act 2023: Ushering in a New Era of Connectivity**

### **About the Painting**

The Union Government on July 04, 2024, issued Gazetted Notification for enforcing section 6-8, 48 and 59(b) of the Telecommunications Act. 2023 w.e.f. today, i.e., July 05, 2024.

The Telecommunication Act 2023 aims to amend and consolidate the law relating to development, expansion and operation of telecommunication services and telecommunication networks; assignment of spectrum; and for matters connected therewith. The Telecommunication Act 2023 also seeks to repeal existing legislative framework like Indian Telegraph Act 1885 and Indian Wireless Telegraph Act 1933 owing to huge technical advancements in the telecom sector and technologies.

Guided by the principles of Samavesh (Inclusion), Suraksha (Security), Vridhhi (Growth), and Tvarit (Responsiveness), the Act aims to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India).

The Telecommunications Act, 2023, was passed by the Parliament in December 2023, received the assent of President of India on December 24, 2023 and was published in the official Gazette on the same day. Some sections of the Act have already been brought into force w.e.f. 26th June, 2024 vide Notification No.2408(E) dated 21st June, 2024 in the Gazette of India.

The salient features of the sections that have been brought into force with effect from July 05, 2024 (Today) are:

1. **Optimal utilization of spectrum:** The Act provides legal framework for efficient utilization of scarce spectrum through processes such as secondary assignment, sharing, trading, leasing and surrender of spectrum. It also enables the utilisation of spectrum in a flexible, liberalised and technologically neutral manner. It also empowers the Central Government to establish an enforcement and monitoring mechanism for the purpose.

2. **Prohibition of use of equipment which block telecommunications:** The Acts prescribes, with immediate effect, the use of any equipment which blocks telecommunication, unless permitted by the Central Government.

3. **Criteria for appointment as Chairperson and Members of TRAI:** Section 59(b) of the Act will amend section 4 of the TRAI Act 1997 and prescribes criteria for appointment of Chairperson and Members of TRAI.

One major aspect that is being covered in the latest notification is the Focus of the Central Government on increasing efficiency in spectrum utilization and various modes of achieving the same like secondary assignment, sharing/trading etc.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains paper II; Governance

Source: PIB