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1. Mpox declared a global health emergency: will it trigger another pandemic?**Why in News?**

The World Health Organization has declared the ongoing outbreaks of mpox in Congo and elsewhere in Africa to be a global emergency, requiring urgent action to curb the virus' transmission.

Sweden has since announced it had found the first case of a new form of mpox previously only seen in Africa in a traveler, while other European health authorities warned more imported cases were likely.



Is mpox going to trigger another pandemic?

That seems highly unlikely. Pandemics, including the most recent ones of swine flu and COVID-19, are typically sparked by airborne viruses that spread quickly, including by people who may not be showing symptoms.

Mpox, also known as monkeypox, is spread primarily through close skin-to-skin contact with infected people or their soiled clothes or bedsheets. It often causes visible skin lesions that could make people less likely to be in close contact with others.

To stay safe, experts advise avoiding close physical contact with someone who has lesions resembling mpox, not sharing their utensils, clothing or bedsheets and maintaining good hygiene like regular hand-washing.

How different is mpox from COVID-19?

Mpox spreads very slowly unlike the coronavirus. Shortly after the coronavirus was identified in China, the number of cases jumped exponentially from several hundred to several thousand; in a single week in January, the case count increased more than tenfold.

By March 2020, when WHO described COVID-19 as a pandemic, there were more than 126,000 infections and 4,600 deaths — about three months after the coronavirus was first identified.

In contrast, it's taken since 2022 for mpox cases to hit nearly 100,000 infections globally, with about 200 deaths, according to WHO.

There are vaccines and treatments available for mpox unlike in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How quickly will these mpox outbreaks be stopped?

It's unclear. The 2022 mpox outbreak in more than 70 countries was slowed within months, thanks largely to vaccination programs and drugs being made available to at-risk populations in rich countries.

At the moment, the majority of mpox cases are in Africa — and 96% of those cases and deaths are in Congo, one of the world's poorest countries whose health system has mostly collapsed from the strain of malnutrition, cholera and measles. Although Congolese officials requested 4 million vaccines from donors, it has yet to receive any.

Despite WHO declaring mpox a global emergency in 2022, Africa got barely any vaccines or treatments.

Beyrer of Duke University said it was in the world's interest to invest now in squashing the outbreaks in Africa.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

2. What the rise of 37-year-old Thailand PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra means for the country's politics

Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Thailand's new Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, two days after the country's Parliament elected her as the new PM. Her election comes more than a year after her centre-right Pheu Thai party came second in the general election. Although the progressive Move Forward Party (MFP) had won the largest number of seats, a political arrangement brokered by Paetongtarn's father and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-06) resulted in a coalition led by Pheu Thai coming to power.



Pheu Thai leader Srettha Thavisin became prime minister in August 2023. However, less than a year later, he was ousted from the position by the order of a constitutional court on August 14. The court said Srettha had been dishonest and had "breached ethical standards" by appointing an individual with a criminal conviction to his cabinet.

Paetongtarn is the third member of the Shinawatra family to become prime minister after Thaksin and his sister Yingluck, who occupied the post from 2011-14. Both Thaksin and Yingluck were removed from power in military coups.

Many in Thailand had looked to the MFP with hope of political reform, given the decades-old dominance of the military and the Thai royalty over the country's politics.

Who is Paetongtarn Shinawatra?

Paetongtarn, the youngest-ever PM of the nation of 70 million, joined politics only three years ago. Having studied hotel management in the United Kingdom, she had been managing Thaksin's Rende hotel group.

Paetongtarn "describes herself as a compassionate capitalist, a social liberal who fully supports Thailand's new equal marriage law". However, her personality is mainly seen as being indistinct from the legacy and reputation of the powerful Shinawatra clan.

Thaksin, who is now 75, was in the police before joining politics. He also owned several businesses in key sectors and expressed disdain for the country's entrenched elites, such as businessmen, bureaucrats, and other power players linked to the influential monarchy and the military. The two institutions are seen as helping sustain each other in Thailand's constitutional monarchy.

Thaksin's welfare policies cemented his popularity among poor and rural Thais. But in 2006, protests erupted following allegations that the Shinawatra family had failed to pay taxes on their businesses, leading to a military-orchestrated ouster.

Yingluck was accused by opposition leaders of running a proxy government for Thaksin. She too was ousted after a judicial order against her in 2014. Thaksin has since backed several parties, and has remained a powerful player in Thai politics.

What are the implications of the Shinawatrass' return to power?

Thaksin is seen as a once-popular leader who has joined hands with the conservative forces he was earlier positioned against. This 'deal' reportedly allowed the former PM to return to Thailand in 2023, after having lived in exile for 15 years. During this period, he was sentenced to eight years in prison over an abuse-of-power case during his tenure, but the sentence was reduced to one year by King Maha Vajiralongkorn last September.

On August 17, Thaksin received a royal pardon reducing his parole to two weeks.

What happens next?

Analysts believe Petongtarn Shinawatra will likely be in her father's shadow, given her inexperience and the mammoth task of heading the government. Ensuring her political survival will be Thaksin's major challenge given Thailand's turbulent political history, which has seen 19 coups since the country became a constitutional monarchy in 1932.

Another concern will be the economy. According to a Nikkei Asia report, "The economy has grown 1% to 4% per year since the 2014 coup, compared with around 5% for Southeast Asia as a whole. Cheap labour and infrastructure investments once drove rapid growth, but the country has struggled to further develop its industrial base even as Vietnam and other neighbours catch up."

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

3. Can Sheikh Hasina be extradited to Bangladesh? What are India's options?

Why in News?

With former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina facing multiple criminal cases back at home, it is likely that India's eastern neighbour may push for her extradition.

Bangladesh's de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain said as much in an interview to Reuters on Thursday (August 15). He said that since Hasina's ouster, a number of cases had been filed against her, and that should the country's home and law ministries decide, Bangladesh may need her to "return to Bangladesh". He also said that such a situation could diplomatically embarrass India, and that he was sure India "would take care of it".

Do India and Bangladesh have an extradition treaty?

Yes. India and Bangladesh signed an extradition treaty in 2013, which was then amended in 2016 to ease and hasten the exchange of fugitives between the two countries.

The treaty came into being in the context of several Indian fugitives, particularly those belonging to insurgent groups in the North East, hiding in and operating out of Bangladesh. At the same time, Bangladesh had been facing trouble from outfits such as Jamaat-ul-

Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), whose operatives were found to be hiding in states like West Bengal and Assam in India.

The treaty allowed India to successfully extradite Anup Chetia, a top United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) leader, from Bangladesh to India in 2015. Since then, one more fugitive has been handed over to India by Bangladesh through the extradition route. According to sources, India too has handed over a couple of Bangladesh fugitives to its neighbour through this treaty.

What does the treaty say?

According to the treaty, India and Bangladesh are supposed to extradite individuals “who have been proceeded against... or have been charged with or have been found guilty of, or are wanted for... committing an extraditable offence” by a court of the requesting country.

An extraditable offence, the treaty says, is one which carries a minimum punishment of one year imprisonment. This includes financial offences. Crucially, for an offence to be extraditable, the principle of dual criminality must apply, meaning that the offence must be punishable in both countries.

The treaty says that extradition shall also be granted if there is an “attempt to commit or aiding, abetting, inciting or participating as an accomplice in the commission of an extraditable offence”.

Are there exceptions to these rules?

Yes. The treaty says that extradition may be refused if the offence is of “political nature”. But this is limited by the nature of offence. And the list of offences which cannot be deemed as “political” is rather long. These include murder; manslaughter or culpable homicide; assault; causing of an explosion; the making or possession of an explosive substance or weapons by a person intending to endanger life; the use of a firearm with intent to resist or prevent arrest; damaging property with intent to endanger life; kidnapping or taking of a hostage; incitement to murder; and any other offence related to terrorism.

So, can Hasina be extradited by Bangladesh?

Hasina is a political player, and she can claim to seek political asylum in India. However, some of the offences for which she has been booked are excluded from the definition of political crimes in the treaty. This includes cases of murder, enforced disappearance, and torture.

On August 13, Hasina was booked for the murder of a grocery store owner who had died in police firing last month. The very next day, a case of enforced disappearance was filed against her on the charge of kidnapping a lawyer in 2015. On August 15, Hasina was slapped with charges of murder, torture and genocide in a third case.

Things are further complicated by the fact that a 2016 amendment to Article 10 (3) of the treaty did away with the requirement for the requesting country to provide evidence of the offence committed. Now, merely an arrest warrant by a competent court of the requesting country is needed to process an extradition.

Given a request, will India have to send Hasina back?

Not necessarily. There are grounds spelt out for refusal of extradition requests in the treaty. Article 7 of the treaty says that "the request for extradition may be refused by the Requested State if the person whose extradition is sought may be tried for the extradition offence in the courts of that State." This is not applicable in Hasina's case.

That said, Article 8 lists out multiple grounds for refusal including cases in which an accusation has not been "made in good faith in the interests of justice" or in case of military offences which are not "an offence under the general criminal law".

India has the option of refusing Hasina's extradition on the ground that the accusations made against her are not "in good faith in the interests of justice". But this has the potential to adversely impact New Delhi's relations with Dhaka's new ruling dispensation.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express