Supreme Court on Migrants Issue

Why in news?

Taking suo motu cognisance of the plight of the migrant workers, the Supreme Court ordered the Centre and the States to immediately provide transport, food and shelter free of cost to those stranded.

What are the observations made?

- A three-judge Bench has initiated suo motu proceedings based on media reports and representations from senior advocates on the issue.
- The court admitted that the migrants' crisis is even continuing today, since the Centre announced a lockdown, with just 4 hours' notice.
- Large sections of migrant labourers are still stranded on roads, highways, railway stations and State borders.
- The Government of India and the State governments have taken measures.
- But there have been inadequacies and certain lapses.
- Effective concentrated efforts are required to redeem the situation.

What was the court's earlier stance?

- The court could have done this 7 or 8 weeks earlier, when petitions were filed before the top court.
- But back then, the Court had accepted the government's sweeping claims.
- The Centre had then maintained that there were no migrants on the roads any more.
- It said that the initial exodus of workers from cities to their home States had been set off by "fake news".
- With limited intervention, the Court had then merely advised the police to treat the workers on the roads with kindness.
- It also directed the media to highlight the Centre's version of the developments.

What is the way forward for the Court?

- The Court's earlier reluctance to intervene may have stemmed from a belief in letting the executive handle the matter.
- But, in the process, the court abandoned its primary responsibility of protecting fundamental rights, especially of those most vulnerable.

- With the present stance, the Court can now be expected to take a more critical look at the government’s lapses.
- The Supreme Court must now emulate the significant role that various High Courts are playing in holding administrations accountable.
- The Centre imposed a stringent lockdown on the pretext of preparing the health infrastructure.
- The top court must now find out if the Centre had discharged its responsibilities.
- It may even lay down guidelines for planning, coordination and establishment of a mechanism.
- This will go a long way in addressing the economic and humanitarian consequences of Centre's such actions in future.

Source: The Hindu

