UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 17-11-2023

Worldwide Governance Indicators

Recently the Chief Economic Adviser of India raised concern over the use of the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators in rating assessments by credit rating agencies, especially for emerging economies.

- It is released by the World Bank.
- It provides a ranking of 215 countries and territories.
- It is based on six dimensions of governance:
- Voice and Accountability
- Political Stability and Absence of Violence
- Government Effectiveness
- Regulatory Quality
- Rule of Law

Control of Corruption

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These indicators are designed to help researchers and analysts assess broad patterns in perceptions of governance across countries and over time.

The World Bank compiles the Worldwide Governance Indicators using data from more than 30 think tanks, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and private firms deemed credible.

The WGI was developed in 1999 by two World Bank researchers, Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay.

The data are updated annually in September.

Key Facts about the World Bank

It is an international financial institution that provides loans and grants to the governments of low and middle-income/developing countries to pursue capital projects.

It was established along with the IMF at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference.

The WB Group Includes

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD): It provides loans, credits, and grants.

International Development Association (IDA): It provides low or no-interest loans to low-income countries.

International Finance Corporation (IFC): It provides investment, advice, and asset management to private companies and governments.

Multilateral Guarantee Agency (MIGA):It ensures lenders and investors against political risks such as war.

International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID): It settles investment disputes between investors and countries.

India is not a member of ICSID.

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One Portal for Drug Control: Upcoming IT Platform to Track Medicines End-to-End

The integrated IT platform that apex drug regulator (CDSCO) has been working on will be able to track products right from the stage of procuring raw material, to supply chain, and finally patterns of consumption.

- Drug Regulation in India
- Idea to Create One Portal for Drug Control
- About the Drug Portal and its Functions
- Significance of the Drug Portal

Drug Regulation in India:

The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules 1945:These have entrusted various responsibilities to central and state regulators for regulation of drugs and cosmetics.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO):The CDSCO under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.

Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for -

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- Approval of Drugs.
- Conduct of Clinical Trials.
- Laying down the standards for Drugs.
- Control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country.

Coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations.

Further CDSCO along with state regulators, is jointly responsible for grant of licences of certain specialised categories of critical Drugs such as vaccine and sera, etc.

The Indian government has announced plans to subject all medical devices, including implants and contraception, to CDSCO scrutiny.

Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI):DCGI is the head of department of the CDSCO of the Government of India responsible for approval of licences of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, IV fluids, vaccines and sera in India.

DCGI also sets standards for manufacturing, sales, import, and distribution of drugs in India.

Idea to Create One Portal for Drug Control:

The idea to create a unified portal was first proposed during a Chintan Shivir (brainstorming session) earlier this year (in February 2023).

The brainstorming session brought all stakeholders together to discuss ways to improve the regulatory framework after a series of incidents came to light.

For example, the Indian manufactured syrups were found to be contaminated and were even linked to deaths of children in the Gambia and Uzbekistan.

At the same meeting, it was decided that the global standard for good manufacturing practices will be made mandatory for all Indian companies.

The government has already asked around 8,000 smaller companies that do not comply with it to do so.

Now, a team has been formed that is dedicated to working on developing the portal and getting it up and running.

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The online platform will need to be compatible with other government portals such as the Government e-Marketplace, Bureau of Indian Standards and Clinical Trial Registry.

About the Drug Portal and its Functions:

The government has called for software service providers to develop the system.

Apart from manufacturers, distributors and retailers will also need to upload their invoices on the portal for this end-to-end tracking to become possible.

The portal will create provisions to capture information from various stakeholders routinely "similar to ITR returns and GST filing".

Once operational, all other portals used by drug regulators will be discontinued. Hence, the portal will become a single window for all drug regulatory activities.

It will share information about spurious and not of standard quality medicines with state regulators to tackle the problem of the movement of these drugs across state boundaries.

Investigations and prosecution launches will also be done through the portal in such cases.

It will also have a provision to sign documents using authentication mechanisms like OTP, Aadhaar, PAN card, and DigiLocker.

It will also help track all types of court cases for prosecution and convictions.

The upcoming portal will have separate dashboards for separate stakeholders, allowing them access to custom reports on a need-to-know basis.

Significance of the Drug Portal:

The integrated IT platform will bring in transparency and uniformity in all the processes (of drug manufacture and distribution) and create confidence in domestic and international markets.

The platform will bring online activities that are still done physically like periodic safety updates, show cause notices, adverse event reporting and post approval changes.

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The portal will help improve inspections by assigning inspectors at random to various sites in a masked manner, randomised allocation of work such as

Processing applications for licences and approvals, and

Assigning QR codes to samples collected and reports to allow verification at every stage of the process.

It will also automatically generate officials' performance reports.

The portal will create searchable registries of manufacturers, marketeers, retailers, pharmacies, and even subject matter experts.

Gulf of Guinea

The Indian Navy has completed its second anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) in the Atlantic Ocean.

The offshore patrol vessel INS Sumedha, which is on an extended range operational deployment and is currently operating in the Atlantic Ocean along the west coast of Africa, undertook a 31-day anti-piracy patrol, the Navy said on Thursday.

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About the Gulf of Guinea

It is the most northeastern part of the tropical Atlantic Ocean, located off the western coast of Africa.

It is located at 0°0'N and 0°0'E, at the intersection of the Prime Meridian and the Equator.

The region is 2.3 million square kilometres, with 6,000 kilometres of coastline.

It has a relatively narrow continental shelf.

Because of the rivers that pour into it and the region's heavy rainfall, it has warm tropical waters with relatively low salinity.

The Volta and Niger Rivers are two of its primary tributaries.

Coastline:

Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Gabon, Nigeria, Ghana, So Tomé and Principe, Togo, and Sierra Leone are the 16 coastal countries around the Gulf of Guinea.

The Gulf's coastline section is largely low-lying, with mangrove swamps, marshes, and lagoons intermingled.

The shoreline of the Gulf of Guinea is strikingly comparable to South America's continental margin (which spans from Brazil to the Guianas), providing strong support for the notion of continental drift.

The Gulf of Guinea region accounts for more than 35% of the world's total petroleum

It is one of the world's most dangerous gulfs because of the widespread piracy that has severely affected many countries in West Africa, along with other international countries.

What is the significance of the Gulf?

It is believed that the Gulf of Guinea today accounts for 7% and 4.5% of the world's gas and oil reserves, respectively.

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It has been a hotspot for piracy and armed robbery at sea.

It is vital to the major imports and exports of landlocked countries like as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, and Mali.

About INS Sumedha

It is the third ship in the Saryu-class Naval Offshore Patrol Vessels (NOPV) produced in Japan.

Goa Shipyard Limited designed and built it in-house.

On March 7, 2014, it was commissioned into the Indian Navy.

It is part of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet, which is headquartered in Visakhapatnam.

Primary responsibilities include EEZ surveillance, anti-piracy patrols, fleet support operations, maritime security for offshore assets, and escort operations for high-value assets.

Features

It has a displacement of 2,230 tonnes, a length of 105 meters, and a beam of 12.9 meters.

It is outfitted with a cutting-edge weapon and sensor suite.

It is capable of transporting an Advanced Light Combat Helicopter.

The ship is propelled by two diesel engines, the largest of their sort ever deployed in the Indian Navy, and can attain speeds of up to 25 knots.

The offshore patrol vessel has a range of 6,000 nautical miles (11,000 km) at 16 knots (30 km/h), making it suited for extended missions and operations.

India's role in Piracy control and Maritime security

In order to curb, contain, and eliminate the threat of maritime piracy and armed robbery prevailing in the Gulf of Guinea, the Government of India has sent

Indian Navy Ships for patrolling purposes and has sent a fleet to develop anti-piracy capacities of other nations in the vicinity of the Guinean Gulf who are eager to help in fighting for the cause.

Piracy in the region can be defeated through effective cooperation and implementation of legal frameworks.

The legal framework is none other than the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The issue is important in the sense that Piracy is not only a threat to the freedom of navigation but also causes destabilizing effects on global and regional trade and security.

The negative humanitarian impact of this threat on sea, piracy, and the lifeline of international shipping cannot be compromised any longer.

The rapid growth of international trade through maritime navigation and the growth of piracy in the past two decades has been unprecedented.

Another area that is crucial for both India and the Gulf of Guinea is maritime security.

According to a report from the UN Secretary-General, the number of piracy issues has been reduced in the Gulf by the deterrent effects of the Nigerian Navy naval patrols.

Sub-categorisation within Castes

In an election rally in Telangana, PM Modi promised to look into the sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) to identify and help the most backward among them.

This move has been read as an attempt by the ruling party to woo the Madiga community.

The Madigas are the most populous of all SC communities in the State.

However, they have claimed that their share of representation was being taken up by another SC community, the Malas.

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Following agitation by Madigas, the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh split the state's scheduled caste quota in 1997 into four categories.

Legality of Sub-categorisation within Castes:

In the last two decades, multiple States like Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu have tried to bring in reservation laws at the State level in a bid to sub-categorise SCs.

However, all plans are held up in courts as the Supreme Court forms its larger Constitution Bench to decide the matter.

E.V. Chinnaiah v State of Andhra Pradesh (2004):

In 2004, the 5-Judge Bench in E.V. Chinnaiah held that once a community is included in the Presidential List for Scheduled Castes under Article 341 of the Constitution, they become part of a single larger class of people, casting a wide net for the purposes of reservation.

The Bench held that the State did not have the legislative power to create sub-classifications within this single class and that such an action would violate the Right to Equality.

The Constitution has provided that these lists can only be made by Parliament and notified by the President.

In 2020, another five-member Supreme Court bench in the Davinder Singh case unanimously ruled that sub-categorisation is constitutionally valid and suggested a larger constitutional bench rule on the matter.

Union Government's Stand:

The Union government formed a National Commission to look into the question of sub-categorising SCs in Andhra Pradesh and the then Cabinet recommended an amendment to Article 341 of the Constitution of India to allow for it.

But both the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) had opined that a constitutional amendment was not necessary.

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They said that Article 16(4) of the Constitution already provided for States to create special laws for any backward classes it felt was under-represented.

Arguments in Favour of Sub-Categorisation within SCs:

From the Justice Raju Commission to the National Commission, the principal argument for sub-categorisation of SCs has been the graded inequalities among SC communities.

The Justice Raju Commission was formed by the Andhra Pradesh state government in 1996 to look into the matter.

The thrust of it has been that even among the marginalised, there are communities that have lesser access to basic facilities.

As a result, the relatively more forward communities among them have managed to avail benefits consistently while crowding the more backward ones out.

The solution, therefore, is to sub-categorise the communities and provide separate reservation to the more backward communities within the reservation meant for SCs.

Arguments Against Favour of Sub-Categorisation within SCs:

Both the SC and ST Commissions have noted that allotting separate reservations within the categories would not really address the root cause of the problem.

In an internal note prepared by the NCST, it had explained that the most backward SCs are lagging so far behind forward SC communities that a separate quota would not help.

It said that the idea was to ensure representation at all levels.

But given the disparity, even if posts were reserved at higher levels, these most backward SCs would not have enough candidates to be considered for it in the first place.

Both the NCSC and the NCST had thus recommended that existing schemes and government benefits should first reach these sections before any sub-categorisation.

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Legal experts have pointed out the necessity to have concrete data to support sub-categorisation.

The Climate Changed Child

A new UNICEF report titled 'The Climate Changed Child.' has been released.

The report captured how the various climate and environmental shocks driven by climate change are impacting the lives of children.

Findings of the Report

Most affected children

The largest share of affected children resides in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia regions.

In these areas, limited water resources, high seasonal variability, and risks of groundwater table decline or drought persist.

Water Security

The report analyses three tiers of water security globally—water scarcity, water vulnerability, and water stress.

Alarmingly, 436 million children face extreme water vulnerability, grappling with both high-water scarcity and low drinking water service levels, putting their lives, health, and well-being at risk.

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This extreme water vulnerability is a significant driver of preventable diseases, particularly among children under 5.

The most affected children predominantly live in low- and middle-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Southern Asia, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia.

In 2022, 436 million children were residing in areas experiencing extreme water vulnerability.

Countries such as Niger, Jordan, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Chad, and Namibia are among the most impacted, with eight out of 10 children facing exposure.

Heatwave

559 million children are currently exposed to high heatwave frequency. This can impact all the 2.02 billion children globally by 2050. Around 470 million children, as of 2022, faced high or extremely high drought risk.

Floods

The health of children is affected by extreme weather events like floods that are linked with climate change.

Floods compromise safe water supply, damage sanitation facilities and occur in areas grappling with open defecation issues, leading to contamination of water. This can make way for outbreaks of diseases like diarrhoea.

Child malnutrition is worsened by crop failures and rising food prices, exacerbated by higher temperatures and increased rainfall linked to climate change.

Closing Remarks

This year, UNICEF is launching the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan, which commit to galvanising efforts to fill global gaps to protect the most vulnerable children.

The report asserted that confronting the planetary crisis for children requires a global movement of partnership.

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COP28 is a critical opportunity to finally put children on the climate change agenda.

UNICEF called for embedding children and intergenerational equity in the Global Stocktake.

Global Stocktake is a process for countries and stakeholders to see where they are collectively making progress towards meeting the goals of the Paris Climate Change Agreement and where they are not.

UNICEF also pitched for inclusion of children and climate-resilient essential services within the final decision on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).

GGA collective commitment under Article 7.1 of the Paris Agreement is aimed at "enhancing" (the world's) adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability to climate change.

Ahead of COP28, the child rights body also called for making the Loss and Damage Fund and funding arrangements child-responsive. These, it hinted, could be made a reality with child rights embedded in the fund's governance and decision-making process.

The fund is aimed to provide financial assistance to countries most vulnerable and impacted by the effects of climate change and was a highlight at COP27.

Exercise MITRA SHAKTI

A joint military exercise, "Exercise MITRA SHAKTI-2023" is being conducted from November 16th to 29th, 2023, in Aundh (Pune).

About Exercise MITRA SHAKTI:

It is a joint military exercise between India and Sri Lankan army.

This year is the ninth edition of the exercise.

The Indian contingent, of 120 personnel, is being represented mainly by troops from the MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY Regiment.

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Personnel from the Indian Air Force and the Sri Lankan Air Force are also participating in the exercise, which makes the ninth 'Mitra Shakti' the first bilateral and bi-service exercise between the two countries.

The aim of the exercise is to jointly rehearse the conduct of sub-conventional operations under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The scope of the exercise includes synergizing joint responses during counter-terrorist operations.

In addition, Army Martial Arts Routine (AMAR), combat reflex shooting, and Yoga will also form part of the exercise curriculum.

It will also involve the employment of Drones and Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems besides helicopters.

Drills to secure helipads and undertake casualty evacuation during counter-terrorist operations will also be rehearsed jointly by both sides.

Collective efforts will focus on achieving an enhanced level of interoperability amongst the troops and reducing the risk of life and property while keeping the interests and agenda of the UN at the forefront during peacekeeping operations.

The exercise will also foster strong bilateral relations between the two neighbouring nations.

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