UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 02-03-2024

GATS

The WTO has initiated the Services Domestic Regulation (DSR) agreement, with 72 member nations voluntarily assuming extra obligations to streamline service trade, addressing issues like licensing, technical standards, and qualification procedures.

Details

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has implemented the Services Domestic Regulation (DSR) agreement, with 72 member nations voluntarily committing to additional obligations aimed at facilitating service trade among themselves.

This initiative is centered on alleviating challenges associated with licensing requirements, technical standards, and qualification procedures, thus aiming to streamline and simplify the process of trading services among the participating nations.

Services Domestic Regulation (DSR)

DSR is a set of disciplines aimed at addressing unintended trade-restrictive effects related to licensing requirements, procedures, qualification requirements and procedures, and technical standards in the services sector.

These disciplines are designed to ease non-good trade among the participating nations.

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Implementation and Participating Nations

The DSR pact, with voluntary obligations, came into force on the second day of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO.

72 nations have agreed to take on additional obligations under GATS, extending similar concessions to all WTO members.

The obligations are outlined in the schedules in GATS, and they aim to create a more favourable environment for services trade.

Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) Principle

The disciplines will be applied on a "most-favoured-nation" principle, meaning that the benefits will extend to all WTO members.

Indian professional companies are expected to have equal opportunities to access markets in the 70 participating countries if they meet the specified standards.

Economic Projections

A new research study by the WTO suggests that the implementation of these new obligations will reduce services trade costs, with estimated savings of $127 billion.

By 2032, it is projected that global real income will increase by at least 0.3% (representing $301 billion), and global service exports are expected to rise by 0.8% (amounting to $206 billion).

Participating Countries

The initiative includes 72 nations, such as Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the US.

Network Planning Group

The 66th meeting of Network Planning Group (NPG) was held in New Delhi, under the chairpersonship of Additional Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to evaluate three projects from Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and two projects from Ministry of Railways (MoR).

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About Network Planning Group

It is an Integrated Multimodal Network Planning Group (NPG) with heads of Network Planning Division of all connectivity infrastructure Ministries & Departments.

It is responsible for unified planning and integration of the proposals and assist the Empowered Group of Secretaries (EGoS) in respect of its mandate.

It facilitates regular interactions between the stakeholders.

It will guide all the Departments/ Ministries responsible for creation of economic zones and connectivity infrastructure during the planning phase itself.

The parameters/prescribed norms of the overall National Master Plan will be the overarching objective of the NPG for examining and sanctioning future projects thus leading to minimising disruptions and strive for the creation of an ideal & efficient operating system for all infrastructure projects in the country.

Its role is to ensure:

integration of networks;

enhance optimization through modification/expansion/new network creation;

avoid duplication of works for holistic development of any region;

reduction logistics costs through micro-plan detailing.

What is PM GatiShakti?

It is an approach for growth accelerating trustworthy infrastructure through synchronized, holistic, integrated and comprehensive planning based on knowledge, technology and innovation.

PM GatiShakti National Master Plan provides comprehensive database of the ongoing & future projects of various Ministries i.e. Infrastructure Ministries & Ministries and States involved in development of Economic Zones, integrated with 200+ GIS layers thereby facilitating planning, designing and execution of the infrastructure projects with a common vision.

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Samudra Laksamana

The Exercise Samudra Laksamana kicked off on February 28 and will continue until March 2, taking place at or off the coast of Visakhapatnam.

It is a joint naval exercise between the Indian Navy and Royal Malaysian Navy.

It is the 3rd edition of this exercise.

Indian Naval Ship Kiltan and Royal Malaysian Ship KD Lekir are participating in this exercise which has harbour professional interactions followed by the operational phase at sea.

At harbour, crew of both ships will have various professional interactions, Subject Matter Expert Exchange on topics of mutual interest, sports fixtures, and other interactions.

These interactions are aimed to enhance knowledge base, share best practices and further cooperation on maritime aspects.

During sea phase, units would be jointly honing skills while conducting various operations at sea.

The exercise aims to strengthen bonds and enhance interoperability between the Indian and Royal Malaysian Navy.

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Key points about INS Kiltan

It is an indigenously-built anti-submarine warfare stealth corvette

This is the third of the four Kamorta-class corvettes being built under Project 28.

The ship derives its name from one of the islands in Aminidivi group of the strategically located Lakshadweep and Minicoy group of islands.

It is designed by the Indian Navy's in-house organisation Directorate of Naval Design and built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE) in Kolkata.

Bureau of Energy Efficiency

Recently, 22nd Foundation Day of the Bureau of Energy Efficiency was celebrated in New Delhi where the union Power and New & Renewable Energy Minister commends BEE for its innovative and world-leading programmes and released the State Energy Efficiency Index 2023.

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About Bureau of Energy Efficiency

It was established in 2002 under the provisions of the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.

Objective: The primary objective of BEE is to reduce energy intensity in the Indian economy.

Function and Duties

It coordinates with designated consumers, designated agencies and other organizations; recognizes, identifies and utilizes the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the Energy Conservation Act.

The EC Act provides for regulatory and promotional functions which are assigned to the organisation.

Regulatory functions

Develop minimum energy performance standards for equipment and appliances under Standards and Labelling

Develop minimum energy performance standards for Commercial Buildings

Develop Energy Consumption Norms for Designated Consumers

Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Power

State Energy Efficiency Index 2023

It is the fifth edition of The State Energy Efficiency Index (SEEI), initiated by Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), in association with Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy.

It is to evaluate the annual progress of energy efficiency implementation in the states.

It identifies and addresses gaps concerning state-level energy efficiency policies, programmes, and investments.

It assesses the performance of 36 states and UTs using 65 qualitative, quantitative, and outcome-based indicators measures distributed across seven demand sectors: buildings, industry, municipal services, transport, agriculture, electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs), and cross-sector initiatives.

In SEEI 2023, the states and UTs are categorized as 'Front runner' (>=60), 'Achiever' (50-59.75), 'Contender' (30-49.75), and 'Aspirant' (<30) based on their total scores.

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Furthermore, to enable peer-to-peer comparison of performance, all the states and UTs are classified into four groups based on their total final energy consumption (TFEC): Group 1 (>15 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MTOE)), Group 2 (5-15 MTOE), Group 3 (1-5 MTOE), and Group 4 (<1 MTOE).

The top-performing states in each group are Karnataka (Group 1), Andhra Pradesh (Group 2), Assam (Group 3), and Chandigarh (Group 4).

Genome India Project

The Genome India Project recently announced that it had finished sequencing 10,000 Indian genomes.

About Genome India Project

It is a pan-India initiative focused on the whole genome sequencing of representative populations across India.

Goal: The goal is to start with and execute whole genome sequencing and subsequent data analysis of 10,000 individuals representing the country's diverse population.

This is a mission-mode, multi-institution consortium project, the first of its kind in India, supported and funded by the Department of Biotechnology, Government of India.

The specific aims of the project are:

Create an exhaustive catalog of genetic variations (common, low frequency, rare, single nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs, and structural variations) in Indians.

Create a reference haplotype structure for Indians. This reference panel can be used for imputing missing genetic variation in future studies.

Design genome-wide arrays for research and diagnostics at an affordable cost.

Establish a biobank for DNA and plasma collected for future use in research.

What is Genome?

A genome is the complete set of genetic information in an organism.

In living organisms, the genome is stored in long molecules of DNA called chromosomes.

In humans, the genome consists of 23 pairs of chromosomes located in the cell's nucleus, as well as a small chromosome in the cell's mitochondria.

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A genome contains all the information needed for an individual to develop and function.

Foreign Exchange Reserve

Exchange reserves surged by $2.98 billion to $619.07 billion recently.

About Foreign Exchange Reserve

Foreign Exchange Reserves (also called Forex Reserves) are reserve assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies.

Foreign assets comprise assets that are not denominated in the domestic currency of the country.

These may include foreign currencies, bonds, treasury bills, and other government securities.

Reserves are denominated and expressed in the US dollar, which is the international numeraire for the purpose.

RBI is the custodian of the foreign exchange reserves in India.

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India's foreign exchange reserves comprise of;

Foreign currency assets (FCAs): These are maintained in currencies like the US dollar, euro, pound sterling, Australian dollar, and Japanese yen.

Gold

SDR (Special Drawing Rights): This is the reserve currency with the IMF.

RTP (Reserve Tranche Position): This is the reserve capital with the IMF.

The biggest contributor to India's Forex reserves is foreign currency assets, followed by gold.

Purpose:

They are used to back liabilities on their own issued currency, support the exchange rate, and set monetary policy.

To ensure that RBI has backup funds if their national currency rapidly devalues or becomes altogether insolvent.

If the value of the Rupee decreases due to an increase in the demand for the foreign currency, then RBI sells the dollar in the Indian money market so that depreciation of the Indian currency can be checked.

A country with a good stock of forex has a good image at the international level because the trading countries can be sure about their payments.

A good forex reserve helps in attracting foreign trade and earns a good reputation with trading partners.

UNHRC

India strongly rejected Pakistan's attempts to raise the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the UNHRC, emphasizing that it considers the region an integral and inalienable part of India. It asserted that constitutional measures taken by the Indian government in the region are internal matters.

India criticized Pakistan for its support of terrorism and its poor human rights record. It highlighted Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism and systemic persecution of minorities, contrasting it with India's progress in economic development and social justice.

India reiterated that Pakistan has no standing to pronounce on matters internal to India, particularly regarding Jammu and Kashmir.

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United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

The UNHRC is the leading intergovernmental body within the United Nations responsible for upholding human rights globally.

It investigates alleged human rights violations, issues recommendations to states and the UN system on improving human rights protections, and plays a role in setting international human rights standards.

Foundation

The UNHRC was established in 2006 by the UN General Assembly. It superseded the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced criticism for its perceived ineffectiveness and politicization.

Location

The UNHRC is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, operating within the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Membership

The UNHRC comprises 47 member states elected by the UN General Assembly. Seats are distributed across five regional groups to promote fair geographical representation.

Members serve three-year terms and are eligible for re-election for one consecutive term.

Structure

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President & Bureau: Handles procedural and management aspects.

Working Groups and Special Mechanisms: Focus on specific human rights issues or country situations (e.g., Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Special Rapporteur on Torture).

Universal Periodic Review (UPR): A unique mechanism in which the human rights records of all UN member states undergo peer review through a cycle.

Activities

Monitoring: Scrutinizes human rights situations globally and takes action where concerns exist.

Investigating: Initiates in-depth investigations through commissions of inquiry or by appointing special rapporteurs (experts) where allegations of severe abuses occur.

Reporting: Provides detailed public reports about human rights conditions and specific investigations.

Recommendations: Provides guidance to states, the UN system, and other actors on improving human rights practices.

Standard-Setting: Contributes to the development of new human rights instruments such as treaties and declarations.

Capacity-Building: Offers technical assistance and training to help states meet their human rights obligations.