



CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY MAY 2018

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Polity and Social Issues

India accedes to Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

What is the issue?

- The Union Cabinet has given approval to accede to the Protocol under World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on tobacco control to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products.

What does this mean for India?

- Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large.
- India, being at the forefront of tobacco control, would be able to influence the international organizations including World Custom Organization in controlling such illicit trade.

WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

- Is the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO.
- The objective of FCTC is to provide a framework for supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco control at the national, regional and global levels.
- One of the key tobacco supply reduction strategies contained in Article 15 of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting.
- Accordingly, the said Protocol was developed and adopted by the Conference of Parties (COP) which is the governing body of FCTC.
- The protocol is divided into 10 parts and contains 47 Articles.

World Health Organisation (WHO) :

Established in which year?

- Established on 7th April 1948. Constitution of World Health Organisation (WHO) was signed by 61 countries in 22 July 1946 with first meeting of WHO completing on 24 July 1948.

- Headquarters is located at Geneva, Switzerland.

Works under which International Organisation?

- WHO is a special agency of United Nations concerned with international public health.

Head of the Organisation

- The head of the organisation is Director-General elected by World Health Assembly.

Members

- All countries which are members of United Nations can become members of WHO by accepting its constitution.
- At present there are 194 member states.

Any reports released by the organisation

- WHO is responsible for World Health Report (World wide Health Survey) and World Health Day (7th April).

Functions of the Organisation

- The primary role is to direct and coordinate international health within the United Nations' system.

Main areas of work are

1. Health systems
2. Promoting health through the life-course
3. Noncommunicable diseases
4. Communicable diseases

5. Corporate services

6. Preparedness, surveillance and response.

- Providing leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed.
- Shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge.
- Setting norms and standards and promoting and monitoring their implementation.
- Articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options.
- Providing technical support, catalysing change, and building sustainable institutional capacity.
- Monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends.

India among top 5 countries in military expenditure in 2017

What is the issue ?

- The five biggest spenders in 2017 were the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and India, which together accounted for 60 per cent of global military spending according to a report released by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Important take-aways from the report :

- Global military expenditure was \$1739 billion in 2017, an increase of 1.1 per cent in real terms on 2016.
- Total military spending accounted for 2.2 per cent of global gross domestic product in 2017.
- The five biggest spenders in 2017 were the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and India, which together accounted for 60 per cent of global military spending.
- Military expenditure by the USA was unchanged in 2017, at \$610 billion. China increased its military spending by 5.6 per cent, Saudi Arabia by 9.2 per cent and India by 5.5 per cent, while Russia's spending fell by 20 per cent.
- Military expenditure increased in sub-Saharan Africa, South America, Central and South Asia, East Asia and Central and Western Europe.

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- The total military expenditure of the countries in the Middle East for which data is available also increased.
- Military spending decreased in North Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Eastern Europe.
- Military expenditure remained unchanged in North America and South East Asia.

About Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) :

- SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public

Issue of inter-country parental child abduction

What is the issue ?

- The Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee was set up in 2017 to suggest a model legislation to safeguard the interest of the child as well those of the parents when an NRI (Non Resident Indian) marriage goes sour and one of the parents flees from one country to another with the child.

What you should know about the issue before reading further :

- Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction

About the convention :

- Multilateral treaty developed by the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH)
- It provides an expeditious method to return a child internationally abducted by a parent from one member country to another.
- Drafted to ensure the prompt return of children who have been abducted from their country of habitual residence or wrongfully retained in a contracting state not their country of habitual residence.

- Applies only to children under the age of 16.
- As of September 2017, 98 states are party to the convention. In 2016, Philippines and Pakistan acceded to the convention
- India is not a party to the convention.

Why is India not a party to the convention yet ?

- In 2016, the government had decided not to be a signatory to the treaty on the ground that it can be detrimental to the interest of the women fleeing an abusive marriage.

Important recommendations made by the Justice Rajesh Bindal Committee :

- Committee has questioned one of the basic principles of the Hague Convention by arguing that the return of the child to his or her habitual residence may not necessarily be in the best interest of the child.
- It adds that returning a child to the place of habitual residence may result in sending the child to an inharmounious setup as well as overlook the fact that a mother is the primary caregiver of the child.
- The panel has also prepared a draft law to safeguard the interest of the children, as well as those of the parents, particularly mothers.
- The proposed legislation lays down nine exceptions under which a child will not be returned to the country of habitual residence.
- Conditions for refusal are best interest of the child, domestic violence or mental or physical cruelty or harassment against the parent who fled with the child, the parent claiming the return of the child was not exercising the custody rights at the time of removal, and if there is a grave risk that the child would be exposed to physical or psychological harm.
- The panel has also emphasised the importance of the “Indian family system” in ensuring the best interest of the child.
- The report also requires the setting up of an Inter-Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority, which will be the nodal body to decide on the custody of the child, mediate between the warring parties, as well as order the return of the child to the country of habitual residence.

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Genetically modified food to be labelled

What is the issue ?

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has released a plan to label genetically modified (GM) food in India.

What does the draft regulation framework say ?

- All food products having total genetically engineered ingredients 5% or more shall be labelled.
- The total GE ingredients shall be of top three ingredients in terms of their percentage in the product.
- The labelling shall be as: “Contains GMO/Ingredients derived from GMO.”

Why is this controversial ?

- Genetically engineered or modified foods are not legally allowed to be sold in India till date.
- In 2017, the FSSAI itself had informed the Supreme Court that “manufacture, distribution, sale and import of GM food” are not allowed in India and couldn’t be regulated till the government opens up the gate through an official notification.

About Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) :

- Has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts and orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

Highlights of the Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006

- The Act also aims to establish a single reference point for all matters relating to food safety and standards, by moving from multi-level, multi-departmental control to a single line of command.

- To this effect, the Act establishes an independent statutory Authority – the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India with head office at Delhi.

- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the State Food Safety Authorities shall enforce various provisions of the Act.

Establishment of the Authority

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.

- The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

FSSAI has been mandated by the FSS Act, 2006 for performing the following functions:

- Framing of Regulations to lay down the Standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food and specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified.

- Laying down mechanisms and guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system for food businesses.

- Laying down procedure and guidelines for accreditation of laboratories and notification of the accredited laboratories.

- To provide scientific advice and technical support to Central Government and State Governments in the matters of framing the policy and rules in areas which have a direct or indirect bearing of food safety and nutrition .

- Collect and collate data regarding food consumption, incidence and prevalence of biological risk, contaminants in food, residues of various, contaminants in foods products, identification of emerging risks and introduction of rapid alert system.

- Creating an information network across the country so that the public, consumers, Panchayats etc receive rapid, reliable and objective information about food safety and issues of concern.

- Provide training programmes for persons who are involved or intend to get involved in food businesses.

- Contribute to the development of international technical standards for food, sanitary standards etc.

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All courts to have anti-sexual harassment panels: Supreme Court

What is the issue ?

- The Supreme Court asked chief justices or acting chief justices of all high courts to set up anti-sexual harassment committees in courts across the country within two months in accordance with a 2013 law.

Which Act provides for setting up committees against sexual harassment complaints ?

- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013 requires every workplace to set up committees to probe sexual harassment complaints.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013

- The Act seeks to cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized.

- Building on the Vishakha guidelines, the Act calls for the formation of an internal complaints committee and a local complaints committee at the district level. It came into force on December 9, 2013.

Some important provisions of the Act:

1. The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.

2. The definition of “aggrieved woman”, who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organized or unorganized sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.

3. While the “workplace” in the Vishaka Guidelines is confined to the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act goes much further to include organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums etc.

4. Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.

5. The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.

6. The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence.

7. The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.

8. Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

Supreme Court : State cannot reserve mining land on its own

What is the issue ?

- The Supreme Court held that the states cannot reserve mining lands on their own without approval from the centre.

Observations made by the Supreme Court :

- “The state government being the owner of the land and minerals, has a right to make a proposal to the Central government to reserve lands not held under a prospecting licence or mining lease for exploitation by the state government companies or undertakings but approval of the Central government is necessary” .
- “The central government can not only take into consideration factors of national security or public interest but also economic factors, the policy of the government and all such other factors which are relevant to decide the issue whether the land should be reserved for exploitation only by state government undertakings”.

‘Pink booths’ in Karnataka elections

What is the issue ?

- Pink polling booths were established in many parts of Karnataka for the Assembly elections to encourage more women to come out and vote.

About ‘pink booths’ :

- The pink coloured booths called ‘Sakhi’ are entirely managed by women, right from the returning officer to the security personnel.
- The booths have been set up to encourage and facilitate more women to come forward and vote.
- The pink booths are fully equipped with medical aid that includes first aid kits and ORS (oral rehydration system) packets.
- The pink booths were also equipped with wheel-chairs to help elderly women voters.
- The pink booths also had sanitary napkins for the comfort of women voters.
- Close to 450 pink booths were set up across the state for easy voting by women.
- Important to note that men were also allowed to come and cast their votes in pink booths.

Where have pink booths been setup until now :

- Karnataka is the fifth state that had pink booths installed for the Assembly elections.
- The Election Commission had tried this for the first time in the Assembly elections in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, followed by Gujarat and the North East.

