Overhauling the WHO

Why in news?

Recently report based on the COVID panel says that WHO needs to be overhauled and should be given more authority to investigate disease threats.

What does the report says?

- The report has linked the severity of the global outbreak to deficiencies across governments, WHO and other multilateral organisations and regulations that guide official actions.
- It has found a myriad of failures, gaps, and delays that allowed the coronavirus to mushroom into a pandemic.
- It commented that “slow WHO, poor coordination” has to be blamed for this pandemic.
- And said that WHO should be overhauled and given more authority to investigate global disease threats.
- It also reported that the international system remains unfit to avoid another disease from spiralling into one matching Covid-19.

What are factors on which this argument is made?

- In the first weeks of the pandemic, the WHO could have warned countries to assume that the SARS-CoV-2 virus was spreading among people, as a precaution but it did not.
- This request was established by the World Health Assembly, WHO’s decision-making body.
- WHO also could have declared the outbreak in Wuhan, China, a public health emergency of international concern — the highest level of global alert — at the earliest.
- It said that the role of WHO and its director-general has been contentious from the early days of the pandemic as governments sought to understand how the virus emerged and was allowed to spread unchecked.
- WJO also came under criticism that it had protected China by allowing it to conceal the origin of the virus.
- It was hindered by its regulations, which aren’t conducive to take a precautionary approach.

What was the outcome of this?

- So most of the countries failed to heed the warning, chose for wait and see approach rather than taking firm measures to contain the virus.
- In some countries, actions was taken only when ICU beds started to fill and by then it was too late.
- There were also countries which devalued science, denied the severity of Covid-19, delayed responding, and sowed distrust among their citizens leading to deadly consequences.
- But the panel also found that in countries like South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand action was taken earlier to rapidly contain the virus.

What was its recommendations?

- It said that WHO should have the power to investigate outbreaks speedily, with guaranteed rights of access and have the ability to publish information without waiting for a member state's approval.
- It called for the overhauling of the disease surveillance and alert systems so that they function at near-instantaneous speed to detect and verify signals of potential outbreaks.
- It said that an agreement has to be reached to waive vaccine patents, an oversight body and legally binding treaty has to be created to bolster the prevention and response to future pandemics.
- It recommended a single, seven-year term for the WHO director-general and regional directors respectively.
- It called for the creation of a **Global Health Threats Council** that will maintain political commitment to pandemic preparedness and response and hold actors accountable.
- It necessitated the need to create a **Pandemic Framework Convention** within six months to address gaps in international regulations, and to clarify responsibilities between states and international organisations.
- It said that the authority and financing of the WHO needs to be strengthened by developing a new funding model and increasing the member-state fees.
- It recommended an international pandemic-financing facility capable of disbursing $5 billion to $10 billion a year for preparedness and $50 billion to $100 billion in the event of a crisis.

Source: Business Line



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