Prelim Bits 11-08-2023 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Diversity Deficit

Parliamentary panel highlights 'diversity deficit' in Supreme Court, High Courts.

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice released its 133rd report on Judicial Process and their Reforms.

Only 3% High Court Judges appointed since 2018 belong to SC category, 1.5% to ST & 5.3% to minority; Parliamentary Committee calls it 'Diversity Deficit.

Findings

- The data provided by the Government on the social status of the Judges of the High Courts reveals the judiciary suffers from a 'diversity deficit'.
- The representation of SCs, STs, OBCs, Women, and Minorities in the higher judiciary is far below the desired levels
- The representation does not reflect the social diversity of the country
- In recent years there has been a declining trend in the representation from all the marginalized sections of Indian society.

There is no provision for reservation in the judicial appointments at High Courts and Supreme Court level.

Recommendations

- While making recommendations for appointments to the Higher Judiciary, both the SC and the HC, the respective Collegiums should recommend an adequate number of women.
- The Collegiums should also recommend candidates from the marginalized sections of the society including minorities.
- This provision should be clearly mentioned in the Memoranda of Procedure (MoP), which is presently under finalization.
- Adequate representation of various sections of Indian society will further strengthen the trust, credibility, and acceptability of the Judiciary among

References

1. Live Law – Parliamentary Committee calls out Diversity Deficit in SC & HC

2. The Tribune – Parliamentary panel highlights ‘diversity deficit’ in Supreme Court, High Courts

Eris

EG.5.1 variant, a new Covid Strain, code-named Eris, is in circulation and has been behind almost 15% cases in the UK, may not be a concern in India.

Eris

- A new strain of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was identified in the United Kingdom.
- Patients in the United States, Europe and Asia have also been found infected with Eris.
- In the UK, about 39.4% of the cases are due to the XBB.1.16 strain, also known as Arcturus.
- EG.5 is a descendent lineage of Omicron subvariant XBB.1.9.2.
- It carries an additional mutation in the spike protein, which the SARS-CoV-2 uses to enter and infect the human cells, compared to the parent subvariant.
- Within the EG.5 lineage, the subvariant EG.5.1 has an additional spike mutation and represents 88% of the available sequences for EG.5 and its descendent lineages
- As a strain of Omicron, the variant symptoms include runny nose, headache, fatigue, sneezing and a sore throat.

India has reported only one case of EG.5 so far from Pune.

WHO & Eris

- The public health risk posed by EG.5.1 is evaluated as low at the global level.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has classified the EG.5 strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus circulating in different parts of the world, including India, as a variant of interest (VOI).
- The variant has been designated as a variant under monitoring (VUM).
- Variants are broadly categorised into three categories:
    1. Variants of interest
    2. Variants of concern
    3. Variants of high consequence

References

1. Down To Earth – New Covid strain in circulation, may not be a concern for India
2. The Hindu – WHO classifies 'Eris' COVID strain as 'variant of interest’

East Container Terminal (ECT) Project

More than two years after Sri Lanka cancelled a joint India-Japan MoU for the East Container Terminal (ECT) project in Colombo, the three countries are studying ways of restarting trilateral cooperation.

The issue – China factor

- Earlier the Sri Lankan Cabinet unanimously agreed to run the ECT as a fully-owned operation of the state-run SLPA.
- The cancellation of the MoU with India, worth about $500 million as well as the suspension of the Japanese-funded light rail transit (LRT) project had led to a freeze in ties between Tokyo and Colombo.
- A state-run Chinese firm had clinched the contract to develop the Colombo Port's eastern container terminal.
- **Present scenario –** With India and Japan coming to Sri Lanka's rescue during economic crisis, it has sought the return of infrastructure project plans as well as investment from both countries.

The project

- In 2019, India and Sri Lanka signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for "co-operation on economic projects".
- The development and operation of the container terminal was one of the projects in the MoU:
    1. A Container Terminal in Colombo Port as a Joint Venture
    2. Includes Indian investments considering that majority of transshipment in Colombo Port is related to India
- The MoU did not mention the Eastern Container Terminal.
- Nevertheless, India and Sri Lanka had already been in discussion for its development and operation.

Significance for India

- India had been offered the Western Container Terminal earlier, but had refused.
- The ECT is already operational, while the WCT has to be built from scratch.
- For India, the ECT deal was important as 60%-70% of transshipment that takes place through it is India-linked.
- The ECT is also considered more strategic than any other in Colombo Port.
- It is located next to the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT) project, a joint venture between China Merchants Port Holdings Company Ltd. and SLPA.

Reference

1. The Hindu – India-Japan look to restart trilateral cooperation with Sri Lanka

Maui Island

At least 36 people have died as fast-moving wildfires tear through the Hawaiian island of Maui.

The forest fires

- Wind-fueled wildfires that tore through the island of Maui forced the evacuation of

thousands and decimated Lahaina, a historic tourist town.

- Satellite imagery of parts of Lahaina showed that the fires destroyed streets and leveled hundreds of structures, a number of them heritage sites.
- Invasive grasses that are highly flammable have taken over native vegetation and climate change has exacerbated dry and hot conditions that have allowed many wildfires to spread more quickly.
- Worsening drought conditions in recent weeks most likely contributed to the latest blaze.

The Island

- Maui, volcanic island, Maui county, Hawaii, U.S.
- It is separated from Molokai by the Pailolo Channel, from Hawaii by the Alenuihaha Channel, and from the small islands of Lanai and Kahoolawe by the Auau and Alalakeiki channels, respectively.
- Maui takes its name from a Polynesian demigod.
- It was created by two volcanoes, Puu Kukui and Haleakala, which constitute east and west peninsulas connected by a 7-mile wide valleylike isthmus that has earned Maui the nickname of the valley isle.
- The island was first settled by Polynesians c. AD 700.

References

1. BBC – Maui Fires
2. Reuters – Maui Wildfires

Suswagatam Portal

CJI Chandrachud announces launch of 'Suswagatam' portal for e-passes to enter Supreme Court.

- Suswagatam is a web-based and mobile-friendly application that allows users to register themselves online.
- The app enables advocates, visitors, interns and others to register themselves online and get e-passes to enter the apex court.
- The users can request for e-passes for various purposes such as attending court hearing, meeting etc.
- The CJI Chandrachud announced about the new digital facility in presence of a five-judge bench hearing the matter related to abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

References

1. The Hindu – CJI Chandrachud announces launch of Suswagatam portal
2. The Economic Times – CJI Chandrachud launches SuSwagatam portal



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