US-WHO Relationship

Why in news?

The US President sent a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) saying that the body had shown dependence on China.

What did the letter say?

- The US President wrote that the repeated missteps by the WHO in responding to the pandemic had been extremely costly for the world.
- He threatened to halt funding to the WHO permanently if it did not commit to "substantive" improvements within 30 days.
- He also said that he would reconsider the membership of the US in the body.

How much does the US contribute to the WHO?

- A large number of countries, philanthropic organisations, United Nations organisations, etc funds the WHO.
- According to information uploaded by the WHO,
    1. Voluntary donations from member states contribute 35.41%,
    2. Assessed contributions are 15.66%,
    3. Philanthropic organisations account for 9.33%,
    4. UN organisations contribute about 8.1%;
    5. The rest comes from myriad sources.
- The US contributes almost 15% of the WHO's total funding and almost 31% of the member states' donations, the largest chunk in both cases.
- India contributes 1% of member states' donations.
- Countries decide how much they pay and may also choose not to.
- For the WHO, the loss of about 15% of its total funding is bound to have an impact the world over.
- However, unless other countries do the same as the US, the move may not severely hamstring WHO operations.

What does the WHO do with its funds?

- The WHO is involved in various programmes.
- In 2018-19, 8.77% on increasing access to essential health and nutrition services, about 4.36% on prevention and control of outbreaks, etc.

- The Africa countries received $1.6 billion for WHO projects; and South East Asia (including India) received $375 million.
- India is a member state of the WHO South East Asia Region.
- The Americas received $62.2 million for WHO projects.
- That is where most of WHO funding comes from and the least of it goes.

How does WHO prioritise spending?

- The annual programme of work is passed by WHO's decision-making body, the World Health Assembly (WHA).
- The WHA, held annually in Geneva, is attended by delegates from all member states.
- It focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.
- The main functions of the WHA are to determine WHO policies, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The decisions on money allocation depend on the situation in countries.
- The WHO's 13th General Programme of Work (2019-23) lays down: "Unequal development in different countries in the promotion of health and control of diseases, especially communicable diseases, is a common danger."

What are the criticisms of WHO's handling of the pandemic?

- Since it first began handling the pandemic, the WHO has faced criticism from various quarters, much before Trump began his offensive.
- Some have blamed the UN body for the lavish praise it laid on Chinese efforts to contain the virus, while ignoring reports of whistleblowers being targeted in that country.
- It is also criticised for relying on data from China.
- It used this data to announce in January that there was no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the coronavirus.
- It is also blamed for its delay in classifying the outbreak as a global pandemic, which it did on March 11.

What is the US influence over WHO?

- The US, a founding member of the WHO, has long exercised a strong influence over the organisation.
- It has played a key role during the 2014 Ebola epidemic, and combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, among several other achievements.
- US domestic bodies also collaborate with the WHO on a range of issues.
- During the Cold War, the US clout caused the Soviet Union and its allies to leave the WHO for several years.

- The tables now appear to have turned, with the US finding itself at odds with China’s rising sway over the UN body.
- If the US ceases to remain a member state, it would be left with much less access to the WHO resources, especially at a time when it is the worst affected by the pandemic.

Source: The Indian Express

